

= Ecgric of East Anglia =

Ecgric ( killed circa 636 ) was a king of East Anglia , the independent Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdom that today includes the English counties of Norfolk and Suffolk . He was a member of the ruling Wuffingas dynasty , but his relationship with other known members of the dynasty is not known with any certainty . Anna of East Anglia may have been his brother , or his cousin . It has also been suggested that he was identical with Æthelric , who married Hereswith and was the father of Ealdwulf of East Anglia . The primary source for the little that is known about Ecgric 's life is Bede 's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* .

In the years that followed the reign of Rædwald and the murder of Rædwald 's son ( and successor ) Eorpwald in around 627 , East Anglia lost its dominance over other Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdoms . Three years after Eorpwald 's murder at the hands of a pagan , Ecgric 's kinsman Sigeberht returned from exile and they ruled the East Anglians together , with Ecgric perhaps ruling the northern part of the kingdom . Sigeberht succeeded in re @-@ establishing Christianity throughout East Anglia , but Ecgric may have remained a pagan , as Bede praises only Sigeberht for his accomplishments , and his lack of praise for his co @-@ ruler is significant . Ecgric ruled alone after Sigeberht retired to his monastery at Beodricesworth in around 634 : it has also been suggested that he was a sub @-@ king who only became king after Sigeberht 's abdication . Both Ecgric and Sigeberht were killed in battle in around 636 , at an unknown location , when the East Anglians were forced to defend themselves from a Mercian military assault led by their king , Penda . Ecgric , whose grave may have been the ship burial under Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo , was succeeded by Anna .

= = East Anglian allegiances = =

After 616 , Rædwald , who ruled East Anglia during the first quarter of the seventh century , was the most powerful of the southern Anglo @-@ Saxon kings . In the following decades , from the reign of Sigeberht onwards , East Anglia became increasingly dominated by Mercia . Rædwald 's son Eorpwald was murdered by a pagan noble soon after he was baptised in around 627 , after which East Anglia reverted into paganism for three years . In the void left by the death of Rædwald , the first overlord who originated north of the Thames , the pagan Penda of Mercia , emerged to challenge the pre @-@ eminence of the new overlord ( or bretwalda ) , Edwin of Northumbria . The reversion of East Anglia to rule by Eorpwald 's successor , the pagan Ricberht , possibly due to Mercian influence , temporarily overthrew an important pillar of Edwin 's authority .

In contrast , two sons of Rædwald 's brother Eni , who were both eager to renew their Christian alliances , made diplomatic marriages during this period : Anna , who was to become a devout Christian ruler , married a woman of East Saxon connection and his brother Æthelric married a Northumbrian princess , Hereswitha , who was Edwin of Northumbria 's grand @-@ niece . This marriage was probably intended to reinforce the conversion of East Anglia to Christianity .

= = Wuffingas identity = =

Ecgric was a member of the Wuffingas royal family , but his exact descent is not known , as the only information historians have is from Bede , who named him as Sigeberht 's cognatus or ' kinsman ' . The 12th century English historian William of Malmesbury contradicts Bede , stating that Sigeberht was Rædwald 's stepson . The name Sigeberht is not of East Anglian , but of Frankish origin . Rædwald may have exiled his step @-@ son , so as to protect the inheritance of his son Ecgric , who was of his own blood @-@ line .

It has been suggested by Sam Newton that Ecgric may in fact be identical to Eni 's son Æthelric , whose descendants became kings of East Anglia . Æthelric 's son Ealdwulf ruled from about 664 to 713 . After Ecgric 's death , three other sons of Eni ruled in succession before Ealdwulf , an indication that Rædwald 's line was extinct . Æthelric 's marriage to Hereswith suggests that it was expected that he would rule East Anglia and he may have been promoted by Edwin before 632 . Æthelric was apparently dead by 647 , at which time Anna was already ruling and Hereswith had

gone to Gaul to lead a religious life . It has therefore been argued that Æthelric and Ecgric were in fact the same person , a suggestion that is disputed by the historian Barbara Yorke , who notes that the two names are too distinct to be compatible .

Ecgric / Æthelric placed as the son of Rædwald or the son of Eni

= = Joint rule = =

Rædwald 's son ( or stepson ) Sigeberht renewed Christian rule in East Anglia after returning as a Christian from exile in Gaul ( into which Rædwald had driven him ) . His assumption of power may have involved a military conquest . His reign was devoted to the conversion of his people , the establishment of the see of Dommoc as the bishopric of Felix of Burgundy , the creation of a school of letters , the endowment of a monastery for Fursey and the building of the first monastery of Beodricesworth ( Bury St Edmunds ) , all accomplished within about four years .

During at least part of Sigeberht 's reign , Ecgric ruled jointly with him over part of the kingdom of East Anglia . A passage in Bede 's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* describing the reasons for Sigeberht 's abdication also mentions Ecgric :

" This king became so great a lover of the heavenly kingdom , that quitting the affairs of his crown , and committing the same to his kinsman , Ecgric , who before held a part of that kingdom , he went himself into a monastery , which he had built , and having received the tonsure , applied himself rather to gain a heavenly throne " :

? Bede , *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

According to Richard Hoggett , the practice of being ruled by more than one individual may have been a common occurrence in East Anglia as it was for the Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdoms of Kent and Northumbria . Ecgric and Sigeberht may have simultaneously ruled the peoples known as the North @-@ folk and South @-@ folk , who lived in the parts of their kingdom that would later become the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk . However , Carver notes that Ecgric may not have reigned jointly with Sigeberht , but could just have plausibly ruled as a sub @-@ king or served as an administrator within a region under East Anglian hegemony , only rising as king of the East Angles after Sigeberht 's abdication .

In contrast with Sigeberht , Ecgric seems to have remained a pagan . There is no evidence that he was baptised or that he promoted Christianity in East Anglia , according to D. P. Kirby , who notes that Bede wrote nothing that could imply that Ecgric was a Christian , in contrast to his praise of Sigeberht 's efforts to establish Christianity in East Anglia .

= = Reign following Sigeberht 's abdication = =

In 633 the Christian kingdoms had suffered a dual shock : Edwin of Northumbria 's death at the hands of Penda of Mercia and Cadwallon ap Cadfan , and the retreat of Edwin 's household and bishop from York to Kent . After 633 the Northumbrian situation was stabilised under Oswald of Northumbria , and East Anglia shared with Northumbria the benefits of the Irish missions of Fursey and Aidan of Lindisfarne . Sigeberht was Fursey 's patron and perhaps soon after his arrival Sigeberht abdicated and retired to the monastery at Beodricesworth ( modern Bury St. Edmunds ) . His abdication , which cannot be dated , left Ecgric to rule the East Anglians alone . Ecgric therefore ruled a kingdom that had been " evangelised in the united spirit of the Roman and Irish Churches " , according to Plunkett , who notes that Felix would have respected the teachings of the Irish missionaries , despite his own strong allegiance towards Canterbury .

= = Death = =

After Ecgric had been ruling alone for two years , East Anglia was attacked by a Mercian army , led by Penda . The date of the invasion is usually given as around 636 , although Kirby suggests it could have been so late as 641 . Ecgric was sufficiently forewarned as to be able to gather an army , described by Bede as *opimus* or splendid . Realising that they would be inferior in battle to the war

@-@ hardened Mercians and remembering that Sigeberht was once their most vigorous and distinguished leader , the East Anglians urged him to lead them in battle , hoping that his presence would encourage them not to flee from the Mercians . After he refused , on account of his religious calling , he was borne off against his will to the battlefield . He refused to bear weapons and so was killed . Ecgric was also slain during the battle and many of his countrymen either perished or were put to flight . The location of the site of the battle in which the East Anglians were routed and their king was killed is unknown , but it can be presumed to have been close to the kingdom ? s western border with the Middle Angles .

Ecgric is a possible contender , as well as Rædwald , Eorpwald and Sigeberht , for being the East Anglian king who was buried within Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo . Rupert Bruce @-@ Mitford suggests that it is perhaps unlikely that Ecgric ? s successor Anna , a devout Christian , would have given him a ship burial , but he does not dismiss the theory entirely .