

= Oslac of York =

Oslac (fl . 966 ? 975) is regarded as the first ealdorman (or earl) of York and its dependent territories . These included but may not have been limited to the southern half of Northumbria . His background is obscure because of poor source documentation . The latter has facilitated disagreement amongst historians regarding his family and ethnicity .

It is believed that he took over the position of ealdorman of York in 966 , holding the position until his downfall in 975 . He may have been the first ealdorman of southern ? as opposed to a united ? Northumbria , though an alternative tradition puts the division of Northumbria into two ealdormanries after his death . Little is known of his career as ealdorman , except for a legend that he escorted the Scottish king Kenneth II to the English royal court , and that he was expelled from England in 975 . His life is unattested after this . He had one known son , but it is not clear if that son ever succeeded him .

= = Origins = =

Oslac 's origins are unclear and no specific relationship with any previous known figure can be established from available sources . Oslac 's name suggests to some historians that he was a Norseman . Susan Whitelock points out that the name Oslac is often an anglicisation of the Old Scandinavian name Áslákr , while the writers of the Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain entry on Oslac comment that the name suggests an origin in the Danelaw , a suggestion supported by the fact that Thored , Oslac 's son , held lands in Cambridgeshire .

On the other hand Oslac is also a genuine English name , and the common Os element Oslac 's name shared with the name of Osulf of Bamburgh , previous ealdorman of York , points to a connection with the Bamburgh family of the English far north .

= = Accession = =

The Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle recorded for the year 966 that Thored , son of Gunnar , raided Westmorland and that Oslac " took the ealdormanship " . Some historians take this to mean that Oslac became the " senior ealdorman of all Northumbria , including the territory of the high @-@ reeves of Bamburgh . "

Records exist of Oslac witnessing charters as early as 963 ; this may mean he was ealdorman by 963 , and would imply the death or deposition of his predecessor Osulf . Some of these charters are problematic as source documents , having been recorded only in later cartularies ; there is thus a possibility of interference in their transmission . Moreover , a charter dated 966 of a grant by dux Thored is witnessed by Oslac minister (i.e. " thegn ") , suggesting that Oslac had not acceded to the ealdormanship of York before 966 .

= = Division of Northumbria = =

De primo Saxonum adventu , an 11th- or 12th @-@ century compilation from earlier sources , claims that after the death of Osulf Northumbria was divided into two parts : Eadulf Evil @-@ child receiving the lands between the Firth of Forth and the River Tees and Oslac receiving the lands between the Humber Estuary and the Tees .

According to John of Wallingford , King Edgar made this division during a council at York , in order to prevent the whole area becoming the inheritance of one man . The Historia Regum claims that such a division took place not in Oslac 's time but Osulf 's , and that the division line was the River Tyne rather than Tees ; historian Dorothy Whitelock considered this to be apocryphal .

= = Career = =

Oslac frequently attested charters of King Edgar the Peaceable , indicating that Oslac enjoyed

some position of trust at court .

De primo Saxonum adventu claims that Oslac , along with Eadulf of Bamburgh and Ælfsige Bishop of Chester @-@ le @-@ Street , escorted the Scottish king Kenneth II to the Wessex @-@ based Edgar :

The two earls [Oslac and Eadwulf] along with Ælfsige , who was bishop of St Cuthbert [968 ? 90] , conducted Cinaed to king Edgar . And when he had done homage to him , king Edgar gave him Lothian ; and with great honour sent him back to his own .

This must have occurred ? if it happened at all ? between 968 and 975 , i.e. between Ælfsige becoming bishop and Edgar dying . Richard Fletcher dated it to 973 .

The historian Geoffrey Barrow believed this to mark the beginning of Scottish control over all the lands between the River Tweed and Firth of Forth (defining " Lothian " in this manner) , though another historian , Alex Woolf , has suggested that the part about Lothian may have been fabricated later to give credence to the claim that the Scottish kings owed homage for lands in Lothian .

= = Downfall and legacy = =

In 975 , not long after the death of King Edgar , Oslac was banished from England . No reason is given by the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle 's report of his expulsion . Version C of the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle describes the events thus :

The valiant Oslac was driven from the country , over the tossing waves , the gannet 's bath , the tumult of the waters , the homeland of the whale ; a grey @-@ haired man , wise and skilled in speech , he was bereft of his lands

The historian Richard Fletcher guesses that Oslac 's downfall may have been the result of opposing the succession of Edward the Martyr .

Oslac is said by the Historia Eliensis to have had a son named Thorth , that is , Thored . His successor was indeed a man named Thored , but it is not clear whether this was Thored Oslac 's son or Thored son of Gunner ; historians tend to favour the idea that Thored the successor was son of Gunner .

The Gesta Herwardi tells us that his great @-@ great granddaughter , Aedeva (Edith) , was Hereward 's mother .