

= Eardwulf of Northumbria =

Eardwulf (fl . 790 ? c . 830) was king of Northumbria from 796 to 806 , when he was deposed and went into exile . He may have had a second reign from 808 until perhaps 811 or 830 . Northumbria in the last years of the eighth century was the scene of dynastic strife between several noble families : in 790 , the then @-@ king Æthelred I attempted to have Eardwulf assassinated . Eardwulf 's survival may have been viewed as a sign of divine favour . A group of nobles conspired to assassinate Æthelred in April 796 and he was succeeded by Osbald : Osbald 's reign lasted only twenty @-@ seven days before he was deposed and Eardwulf became king on 14 May 796 .

Little is recorded of Eardwulf 's family , though his father , also named Eardwulf , is known to have been a nobleman . Eardwulf was married by the time he became king , though his wife 's name is not recorded . It is possible he later wed an illegitimate daughter of Charlemagne . In 798 , early in his reign , Eardwulf fought a battle at Billington Moor against a nobleman named Wada , who had been one of those who killed King Æthelred . Wada was defeated and driven into exile . In 801 , Eardwulf led an army against Coenwulf of Mercia , perhaps because of Coenwulf 's support for other claimants to the Northumbrian throne .

Eardwulf was deposed in 806 and according to a Frankish record , returned to his kingdom in 808 . No record has survived of his death or the end of his reign : dates from 811 to 830 have been suggested . He was possibly buried at the Mercian royal monastery of Breedon on the Hill , which carries a dedication to Saint Mary and Saint Hardulph , with whom Eardwulf is identified by several historians .

= = Background = =

During the latter half of the eighth century , the Northumbrian succession included a long series of murdered and deposed kings , as several royal lines contended for the throne . The main lines were those of Eadberht , Æthelwald Moll and Alhred . In the eight years before Eardwulf 's accession , all three of these dynastic lines were involved in the struggle for kingship : on 23 September 788 , King Ælfwald I , grandson of Eadberht , was murdered by the patricius Sicga near Hexham , and Ælfwald 's cousin Osred became king . Osred , who was of Alhred 's line , was deposed after a year , and Æthelred , son of Æthelwald Moll , who had been deposed in 778 at a young age , was restored to the kingship , resuming the title Æthelred I .

Some Anglo @-@ Saxon kings are known to have been killed by their households or in open warfare against rivals , but overall the record is very sparse . The evidence as regards the deposition of kings is equally limited . Only two eighth @-@ century depositions offer any context , those of Æthelwald Moll in Northumbria and Sigeberht of Wessex . In both cases the decision is presented as that of some form of council .

This record of disputed succession was by no means unique to Northumbria , and the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex experienced similar troubles during the eighth and ninth centuries . In Wessex , from the death of Centwine in 685 to Egbert 's seizure of power in 802 , the relationships between successive kings are far from clear and few kings are known to have been close kinsmen of their predecessors or successors . The same may be true of Mercia from the death of Ceolred in 716 until the disappearance of the Mercian kingdom in the late ninth century .

Kings did not rule alone , but rather governed together with the leading churchmen and nobles . While Northumbria lacks the body of charters which shed light on the institutions of the southern Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdoms , sufficient evidence survives for historians to reconstruct some aspects of Northumbrian political life . The evidence for Northumbria survives largely in Latin documents , and these use the words dux and patricius to describe the leading noblemen of the kingdom . The word dux is usually translated by the Old English word ealdorman . The historian Alan Thacker estimates that there were about eight men holding the title of dux in late Northumbria . The title patricius is usually translated as patrician , which ultimately means noble , but in the latter days of the Roman Empire represented a high @-@ ranking position , second only to the emperor . The meaning of the title in Northumbria is unclear , but it appears that there was only one patricius .

While it may be simply an alternative to dux , it might represent a position approximating to that of the Mayor of the Palace in late Merovingian Francia .

The church in Northumbria was one of the major landowners , perhaps second only to the king . At the head of the Northumbrian church was the Archbishop of York , an office held by Eanbald I to 796 , Eanbald II until some time after 808 , and then by Wulfsgie to around 830 . Immediately below the archbishop were three bishops : the bishop of Lindisfarne , the bishop of Hexham and the bishop of Whithorn . The typically long term of office of senior clerics meant that kings often had to work with men appointed by their predecessors , with whom their relations might be difficult .

= = Relations with other states = =

Northumbria 's southern neighbour Mercia was , under the rule of kings Æthelbald , Offa and Coenwulf , the dominant kingdom in Anglo @-@ Saxon England . Offa , the greatest of the three , ruled Mercia until 796 , followed soon after by Coenwulf . Offa 's dominance was secured in part by marriage alliances with the other major kingdoms : Beorhtric of Wessex and Æthelred of Northumbria were married to his daughters . Further afield , Charlemagne , the pre @-@ eminent ruler in the Christian West , appears to have taken an active interest in Northumbrian affairs . Charlemagne initially ruled Francia and parts of Italy , but by 796 had become master of an empire which stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Hungarian Plain . He was a staunch defender of the Papacy , and in the popes and the church hierarchy he had allies whose influence extended to Northumbria and beyond . Events in southern Britain to 796 have sometimes been portrayed as a struggle between Offa and Charlemagne , but the disparity in their power was enormous , and Offa and then Coenwulf were clearly minor figures by comparison .

Early evidence of friendly relations between Charlemagne and Offa is tempered by signs of strain . Charlemagne sheltered two exiles from England at his court : Odberht of Kent (probably Eadberht Praen) and Egbert of Wessex . Eadberht Praen ruled the Kingdom of Kent for a short time after Offa 's death , but was deposed by Coenwulf . Egbert was more successful , taking and holding the throne of Wessex in 802 . It is clear that Mercian and Frankish interests could not always be reconciled and Frankish policy then moved towards support for Offa 's opponents . To Charlemagne this primarily meant Northumbria : according to Patrick Wormald , " Charlemagne ... saw England as if it were ruled by two kings only : Æthelred ruling Northumbria and Offa ruling everything to the south " . Frankish support for Northumbria thus appears to have been driven by a desire to counter Mercian influence in southern Britain , an area with long @-@ standing ties to Francia . It has also been suggested that Charlemagne 's interest in Northumbria was motivated by a desire for co @-@ operation against Viking raiders , who had first appeared in Northumbria in the early 790s . Alternatively it may be that Charlemagne 's conception of the sphere of his authority included Britain , which had once been part of the Roman Empire .

Initially , both Charlemagne and Offa appear to have shared a common interest in supporting King Æthelred , Offa 's son @-@ in @-@ law . Shortly before Æthelred was murdered in 796 , an embassy from Francia delivered gifts for the king and his bishops . When Charlemagne learned of Æthelred 's killing he was enraged , called the Northumbrians " that treacherous , perverse people ... who murder their own lords " , and threatened retribution . His ambassadors , who had travelled on to Ireland and were then returning home , were ordered back to Northumbria to recover the presents . Charlemagne in time became a supporter of Eardwulf . Eardwulf is said to have married to one of Charlemagne 's daughters , but if this is correct she must have been illegitimate , as the marriages of all the legitimate daughters are known . Coenwulf , on the other hand , who became king of Mercia shortly after Eardwulf 's accession , is recorded as having fought with Eardwulf in 801 .

= = Early life and accession = =

Eardwulf was not , so far as is known , connected to any of the factions that had been warring for the throne up to the mid @-@ 790s . Nothing is definitely known of his background , though Symeon of Durham 's History of the Kings , an early twelfth @-@ century work based on the lost late tenth

@-@ century chronicle of Byrhtferth , records that his father 's name was also Eardwulf , and both father and son are given the title dux . Historian Barbara Yorke has proposed that he was a descendant of one Eanwine who (according to Symeon of Durham) was killed in 740 on the orders of King Eadberht . This Eanwine may be identified with King Eadwulf 's son of the same name . Eardwulf 's father may have been one of the two Eardwulfs whose deaths are recorded by Symeon of Durham in 774 and 775 .

Eardwulf appears to have been an enemy of Æthelred I. He first appears in the historical record circa 790 , when Symeon of Durham reports that :

Eardulf was taken prisoner , and conveyed to Ripon , and there ordered by the aforesaid king [Æthelred] to be put to death without the gate of the monastery . The brethren carried his body into the church with Gregorian chanting , and placed it out of doors in a tent ; after midnight he was found alive in the church .

A letter from Alcuin to Eardwulf suggests that this fortunate recovery was seen as being miraculous .

Eardwulf 's whereabouts after his recovery are not known . In surviving King Æthelred 's anger he was more fortunate than Ælfwald 's sons , who were drowned on Æthelred 's orders in 791 . Osred returned from exile but was betrayed , and killed by Æthelred 's command on 14 September 792 . Æthelred himself was assassinated on 18 April 796 , perhaps at Corbridge , by conspirators led by the dux Ealdred . Æthelred was followed as king by Osbald , whose antecedents are unknown : he was deposed after twenty @-@ seven days and fled to the land of the Picts with a few supporters .

= = King = =

Eardwulf became king on 14 May 796 . The Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle records that he was consecrated by Eanbald I , Archbishop of York , and Bishops Æthelberht , Beadwulf and Hygebald , at York Minster on 26 May 796 .

Eardwulf was evidently married before he became king , as Alcuin reproached him for abandoning his wife for a concubine soon after his coronation . This strained relations with the new Archbishop Eanbald II ? Eanbald I had died in the year of Eardwulf 's coronation . Alcuin , while condemning secular oppression of the church , affected surprise that while the Archbishop Eanbald was travelling he was accompanied by a large retinue , including soldiers , and that he received and protected the king 's enemies . Eanbald was presumably in conflict with Eardwulf over property , but it is likely that he also supported rivals for Eardwulf 's throne .

Although Æthelred had been Eardwulf 's enemy , Æthelred 's killers proved to be equally hostile to Eardwulf . In 798 a dux named Wada , who was one of those who had killed King Æthelred , fought with Eardwulf on Billington Moor , near Whalley , Lancashire . Wada was put to flight and may have gone into exile in Mercia . He may have hoped to restore Osbald to the throne . The evidence for Osbald 's continued ambition is a letter that Alcuin wrote to him , probably in 798 , in which Alcuin attempted to dissuade Osbald from further interventions in Northumbrian affairs . Alcuin 's arguments appear to have succeeded , since Osbald is known to have become an abbot by 799 (when his death is recorded) , implying that he had given up his ambitions .

Two further challenges to Eardwulf are recorded within the next two years , both apparently from among the noble lines that had been fighting for the throne over the previous decades . In 799 , a dux named Moll was killed by Eardwulf 's " urgent command " . Moll 's name has suggested that he was a kinsman of the late King Æthelred , whose father was Æthelwald Moll . The following year , Ealhmund , " the son of King Alhred , as some say " , was killed by Eardwulf 's men . Ealhmund was remembered at Derby , in the neighbouring kingdom of Mercia , as a saint .

King Coenwulf of Mercia may have supported the unfortunate Ealhmund , and Symeon of Durham wrote that in 801 :

Eardwulf , king of the Northumbrians , led an army against Coenwulf , king of Mercians , because he had given asylum to his enemies . He also , collecting an army , obtained very many auxiliaries from other provinces , having made a long expedition among them . At length , with the advice of the bishops and chiefs of the Angles on either side , they made peace through the kindness of the king

of the Angles .

This settlement ended open warfare , but Eardwulf was deposed in 806 , in unknown circumstances . Letters between Charlemagne and Pope Leo III suggest that Coenwulf had a hand in Eardwulf 's removal . According to the thirteenth @-@ century chronicler Roger of Wendover , Eardwulf was replaced by King Ælfwald II , about whom nothing else is known from the written sources , although coins issued in his reign have survived .

As the case of Ælfwald shows , while the written sources for later Northumbria are few and often written down centuries after the events they describe , archaeological evidence from coinage is independent of the surviving annals . Anglo @-@ Saxon coins usually named the king on whose orders they were issued and sometimes named the mint where they were struck ? Northumbrian coinage names York as the place of issue ? and the moneyer who produced them . Their weight and silver content can be compared with other reigns , providing a hint of the prevailing economic conditions , and the style and size may also throw light on cultural influences when the coins are compared with those of neighbouring kingdoms and with other forms of art . The evidence of Northumbrian coinage is particularly valuable in the ninth century , when contemporary written evidence all but disappears .

From the 740s until the end of the Northumbrian kingdom , coins were issued by most kings , although in variable quantities . Until recently no coins from Eardwulf 's reign were known , which suggested that it may have been a time of instability , or perhaps that the kingdom was impoverished by the payment of tribute to Offa and Coenwulf of Mercia . It is now known that the issue of new coins continued during Eardwulf 's reign , as two of his coins were identified in the 1990s . Issues of new currency appear to have been limited under Eardwulf , and significant numbers of Northumbrian coins are not again attested until the reign of Eardwulf 's son Eanred .

= = Exile and return = =

Like many of his predecessors , Eardwulf took to exile when he was deposed . Unlike kings with ties to Lindisfarne , who appear to have chosen exile among the Picts , Eardwulf was linked to Ripon and chose a southerly exile . The next reports of Eardwulf are in Frankish sources :

Meanwhile the king of the Northumbrians from the island of Britain , Eardwulf by name , being expelled from his kingdom and native land , came to the emperor while he was still at Nijmegen , and after he had made known the reason for his coming , he set out for Rome ; and on his return from Rome he was escorted by envoys of the Roman pontiff and of the lord emperor back into his kingdom . At that time Leo III ruled over the Roman church , and his messenger , the deacon Ealdwulf from that same Britain , a Saxon by race , was sent to Britain , and with him two abbots , Hruotfrid the notary and Nantharius of St. Omer , sent by the emperor .

A surviving letter of Leo III to Charlemagne confirms that Eardwulf visited Rome and stayed at Charlemagne 's court .

The Frankish source is clear that Eardwulf was " returned to his kingdom " , but surviving Anglo @-@ Saxon sources have no record of a second reign . Historians disagree as to whether Ælfwald was replaced by Eardwulf , who would thus have reigned a second time from 808 to 811 or 812 , or whether the reign of Eardwulf 's son Eanred began in 808 .

Recent studies , based on the discovery of a penny of Eanred for which a date no earlier than c . 850 is proposed , suggest a very different dating for ninth @-@ century Northumbrian kings . From this , it is argued that Eardwulf 's second reign ended circa 830 , rather than in the years soon after 810 , and that the reigns of subsequent kings should be re @-@ dated accordingly : Eanred from 830 to 854 , Æthelred II from 854 to 862 , Rædwulf in 858 , and Osberht from 862 to 867 .

Eardwulf is identified by historians with the Saint Hardulph or Hardulf , to whom the Mercian royal church of Saint Mary and Saint Hardulph at Breedon on the Hill is dedicated . The connection , though unproven , has been made by several historians and is uncontroversial . Supporting evidence comes from a twelfth @-@ century list of the burial places of saints compiled at Peterborough . This calls the Saint Hardulph to whom Breedon was dedicated " Hardulfus rex " ? King Eardwulf ? and states that he was buried at Breedon .

A panelled stone structure in the church , carved with processions of bearded and robed figures under arches , seems to reproduce details found in the Book of Cerne , a work associated with Bishop Æthelwold of Lichfield (818 ? 830) . The panels , which may originally have been the outer part of a sarcophagus built to hold the remains of a high status person such as Saint Hardulph , are dated by their similarity to the illustrations in the Book of Cerne to the first third of the ninth century . According to a medieval calendar of saints , the Benedictine monks at Breedon celebrated Hardulph 's feast day on 21 August .

The death of Eardwulf is not recorded . Although he had faced considerable opposition and had been driven into exile , he succeeded in founding a dynasty . His son Eanred and grandson Æthelred (II) ruled Northumbria for most of its remaining existence as an independent kingdom .