

KINGDOM OF BENIN - What do we know about the Ancient Kingdom of Benin?

Topic Overview

Rulers

- AD 400** The Yoruba people start using iron tools that allow them to clear the forest land for the first time. Villages developed and chiefs emerged.
- AD 600** The area became one of the earliest kingdoms in the West Ife Rainforest.
- AD 900** The Kingdom of Benin begins to develop and boundaries are created around the area of Igodomigodo (now part of Nigeria).
- AD 1091** The Edo people were ruled by the Ogiso, ('kings of the sky').
- AD 1100** The last Ogiso of Igodomigodo, Owodo, dies and there is nobody to rule.
- AD 1180** Eweka becomes the new ruler and calls himself the Oba.
- AD 1300-1700** The 'golden age' of Edo. It has a large, powerful army and skilled craftspeople.
- AD 1489** When the Portuguese made contact with the Kingdom of Benin the name 'Benin' began to be used.



Societal Change & Religion

- The earliest Benin settlement (by the Edo people) was in the rainforest.
- The Obas(kings) built Benin City known for its high walls (16,000 km long when finished); long, straight roads and street lighting. The buildings were sophisticated and beautifully decorated.
- People believed the Oba was a god and he lived in a huge palace with many servants and slaves. Under the Oba were palace chiefs (organised the craft workers) and town chiefs (ruled the ordinary people). Benin was known for its craft workers. Most ordinary people were farmers.
- The people of Benin worshipped many gods. They told stories and held ceremonies in their honour (many are still performed today).
- People believed that the Obas were the direct descendants of Osanobua, the creator god and there are many stories about this.

Benin City was admired by all who visited



Key Vocabulary

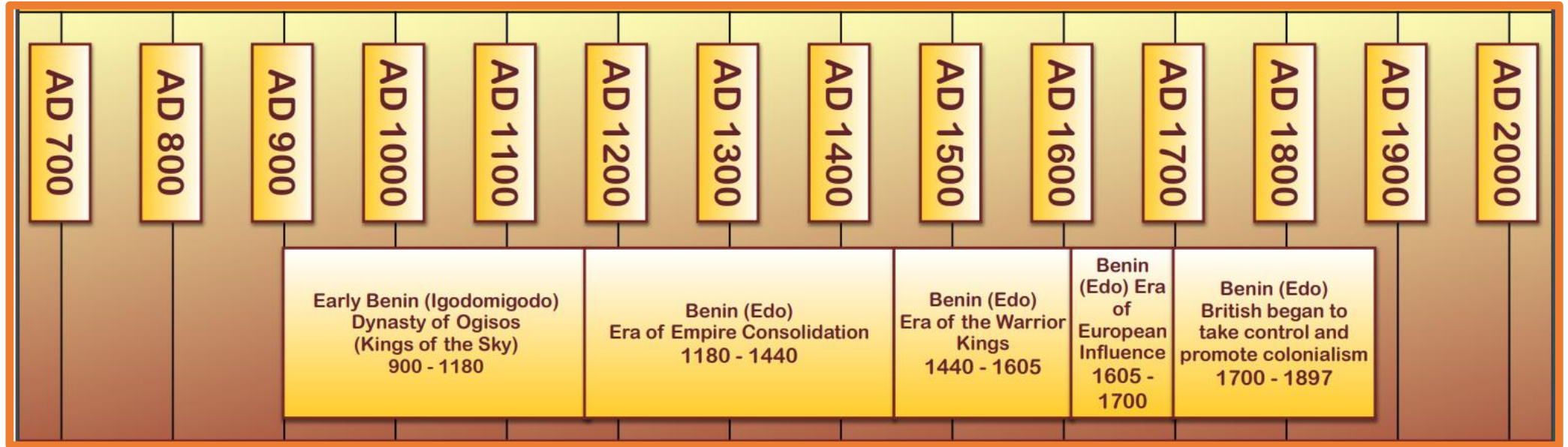
Yoruba	The name of the people who lived in the holy city of Ife.
Edo	The name of the people who lived within the ancient kingdom of Benin.
Ife	The holy city near the Kingdom of Benin, ruled by the Yoruba people
Oba	The Yoruba word meaning 'King'.
Eweka	The first Oba of the Kingdom of Benin. He came to power in AD 1180.
Ogiso	The Edo word meaning 'Kings of the Sky' used by the early rulers of Igodomigodo (the original name of the Benin Empire).
Trade	The exchanging of goods.
Benin City	The modern city located in Nigeria. It used to be called Edo and Igodomigodo, before that Ogiso – the Edo word.
Brass	A yellowish metal made from copper and zinc.
Bronze	A metallic brown metal made from copper and tin.
Yoruba	The name of the people who lived in the holy city of Ife.

Top Take-Aways

Having studied this topic you should be able to:

- Show where the ancient Kingdom of Benin was located on a map.
- Place the Kingdom of Benin on a timeline.
- Use sources, including oral histories and artefacts, to understand how we know about the Kingdom of Benin.
- Know who the Obas were and describe the reign of some of them, using bronzes.
- Understand the creation stories and how and what people believed.
- Understand changes that took place when European settlers started trading.
- Discuss the reasons the British became involved in Benin and the effect this had.

Timeline: Ancient Kingdom of Benin



Map of West Africa showing Ancient Benin



*Benin City in modern-day **Nigeria**, is the location of the ancient Kingdom of Benin. It was **NOT** located in the modern country of Benin - this is a different country in West Africa.*



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