

KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

The ancient Kingdom of Benin: AD 900 to 1900

Location

West Africa.

Benin City in the west of Nigeria is the location of the ancient Kingdom of Benin.

It is NOT located in Benin found on modern maps - this is a different country in Africa.

The three main periods (all AD)

900 - 1300	Early Period
1300 - 1700	The Golden Age
1700 - 1897	The Period of Decline

Timeline of key events

900	Benin Kingdom is first established when small villages join together in a conglomerate.
900 - 1400	An enormous earthen moat is built around the Kingdom boundaries.
1180	The first dynasty of Ogiso kings ends and the Obas begin their rule.
1440	Benin begins to expand and thrive under the rule of Oba Ewuare the Great.
1514	Oba Esigie sets up trading links with Portuguese and other European visitors.
1700	Benin Kingdom enters a period of decline due to a series of civil wars and the abolition of the slave trade with Europe.
1897	Benin City is destroyed by British troops and Benin comes under Britain's control.

Key individuals

Ogiso Igodo	The first king (or Ogiso) of Benin.
Ogiso Owodo	The last of the Ogiso kings, banished from the kingdom with his family for bad conduct around AD 1130.
Oba Eweke	The first of a new dynasty of kings called the Obas, crowned around 1180.
Oba Oguole	Had the Benin City Wall built around 1283.
Oba Ewuare	Expanded the kingdom greatly and set up trading links with Portugal in 1514.
Oba Ovonramwen	The last king of Benin, exiled by British troops after their invasion in 1897.

The people of Benin

Most sources tell us about the rich and powerful people in Benin. Little is known about the ordinary men, women and children.

Historians believe that **most** people:

- were farmers, growing crops like yams and plantains or clearing vast areas of communal land;
- had two or three different jobs
- may have been part of one of the guilds of craftsmen producing goods for trade.

They believe others may have been:

- warriors;
- entertainers;
- builders.

Women were responsible for:

- looking after their families;
- making domestic objects such as cooking pots.

Children:

- did not go to school but learned each day from storytellers.

Extra information

- Storytellers were very important and kept the kingdom's history and mythology alive by telling stories aloud by the fire every evening.
- The people of Benin had many stories involving gods and magic and they believed that non-human objects had spirits or souls, a belief known as 'animism'.
- The builders of Benin made an earthen moat around their kingdom - this is 4 times as large as the Great Wall of China but was destroyed by British soldiers.
- The famous Benin bronzes are now located around the world in museums and with collectors. Nigeria is asking for their repatriation (return to the country of origin).

Key vocabulary

- animism
- archaeologists
- British Empire
- bronzes
- colonisation
- earthen moat
- historians
- Ife
- Igodomigodo - the first unified kingdom
- Nigeria, West Africa
- Oba
- Ogisos (Kings of the Sky)
- Portuguese
- primitive
- repatriation
- Yoruba

ADD ANY OTHER WORDS YOU COME ACROSS TO THIS LIST