



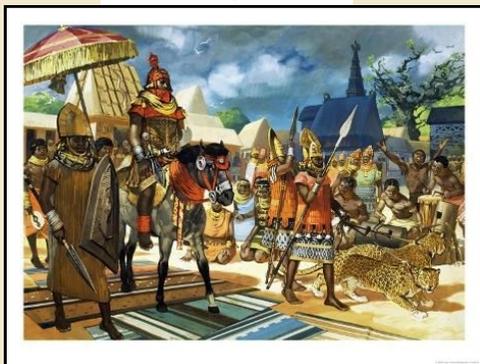
What should I already know?

- I know that time is commonly divided into two periods known as BCE (before common era) and CE (common era); know that these are sometimes replaced with BC (before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, meaning year of our lord)
- I know that one of the earliest civilisations was ancient Egypt, and was based around fertile river floodplains
- I know that ancient civilisations involved large groups of people living together with a shared culture and social hierarchy



Benin was located in West Africa. Benin belonged to the British Empire until 1960 when it became part of Nigeria

The Kingdom of Benin began in the 900s when the Edo people settled in the rainforests of West Africa. By the 1400s they had created a wealthy kingdom with a powerful ruler, known as the Oba. For 200 years Benin was very successful, but in the 1600s the Oba started to lose control of their people. By the 1800s Benin was no longer strong or united. The kingdom came to a sudden end in 1897 when a British army invaded and made it part of the British Empire.



Key Vocabulary

ogiso	The title used by the early rulers of Igodomigodo. It means 'kings of the sky'. It is thought that there were around 31 Ogiso rulers.
oba	The title used by Eweka and subsequent rulers. Eweka was from the Yoruba people and Oba is the Yoruba word for 'king'
edo	The name given to the kingdom of Igodomigodo by Oba Eweka. The people also became known as the Edo people
Yoruba	The name of the people from the holy city of Ife. The histories of the Edo and Yoruba people are closely linked.
ohen	A priest who performed religious ceremonies.
animists	People who believe that humans, animals and objects all have souls or spirits
brass	Brass is a metal composed primarily of copper and zinc.
Idia	Benin's first Queen mother
armlet	armlet, decorative band, usually worn for ornament around the arm
plaque	an ornamental tablet, that is fixed to a wall or other surface in commemoration of a person or event
continent	A continent is a very large area of land, such as Africa or Asia, that consists of several countries
country	A country is one of the political units which the world is divided into, covering a particular area of land.

Key question: Should the Benin bronzes be returned to Benin?

Timeline

400AD	900	1180	1283	1440	1451	1700	1897
Yoruba people use iron tools to clear land.	Benin Kingdom created	The dynasty of the 'Oba' began.	Oba Oguole builds the Benin City wall	Oba Ewuare expanded the kingdom	Oba Ewuare sets up trade with Portuguese visitors	A period of decline due to civil wars and end of the slave trade in Europe	Benin City is destroyed by British troops.

Key knowledge



There are no written texts about the people of Benin. However, they had a rich oral culture. They would tell their history, myths and legends and these would be passed on through word of mouth. They would tell their children as well as the people they met. Treasures of wood, ivory and metal made their way into Europe through trade or plunder and astounded observers with their high degree of artistry and craftsmanship.

Ceremonies were led by an ohen and were intended to make the Oba seem powerful and great, as well as to worship the gods. Ceremonies sometimes involved human sacrifices. Usually criminals or prisoners were sacrificed, although there is evidence of other sacrifices, such as women found at the bottom of wells, dressed in fine clothes.

The people of Edo were animists. Leopards, crocodiles and snakes were among the animals associated with the gods. Many warriors wore necklaces of leopards' teeth to protect them in battle.

How did the people of Benin live?

The people of Benin were famous for their crafts. Specialists in a craft formed groups called guilds. All the members of a guild lived and worked together. There were more than 40 guilds in Benin City. Men from all over the kingdom served the Oba as soldiers. Some brave boys trained as hunters. They started their training very young and the bravest of all became elephant hunters.

The end of the Kingdom of Benin

In 1897 a group of British officials planned to take the journey to visit Benin. They requested to see the Oba but were sent away because the Oba was busy performing a religious ceremony. The British Officials ignored this and visited anyway. As they approached the borders of Benin, a group of warriors saw them and several British men were killed. Word of the attack got back to Britain. They were furious! They sent over a thousand soldiers to invade Benin. Benin City was burnt to the ground and the kingdom of Benin became part of the British Empire

Religion

The people of Benin worshipped many gods. They told stories about their gods and held ceremonies in their honour. According to Edo legends, the great god Osanobua created the world. He had many children. Olokun, his eldest son, became the god of the waters. Obienvin, his daughter, was put in charge of farming and childbirth. Ogiuwu, his youngest son, became the king of death. People believed that the Obas of Benin were the direct descendants of Osanobua, the creator god. The Obas were all worshipped as gods.

People believed that, after death, Osanobua would decide their fate. They would either be reincarnated as another person or would join the spirit world. Spirits would live in villages together, watching the behaviour of their families and punishing bad behaviour.

Trade

The people of Benin traded with other people from Europe and other African kingdoms but instead of using money they exchanged goods.

