

## History Subject Knowledge Bank

### Year 6: Benin Empire

<u>Vocabulary</u>	<u>Definition</u>
<b>Controversy</b>	Discussion and argument
<b>Bias</b>	Inclination for a point of view
<b>Oba of Benin</b>	Ruler of the Edo people
<b>Reign</b>	Period of rule of a Monarch
<b>Legacy</b>	Long lasting impact of events
<b>Causation</b>	Looking at the cause and effect of events
<b>Influence</b>	Have an effect
<b>Era</b>	A distinct period of history
<b>Hypothesising</b>	An idea that is proposed and then tested

#### What happened in West Africa?

- Skilled potters and metalworkers worked with brass or gold. Potters in the kingdom of Nok made sculptures from a type of clay called terracotta. Brass-workers in the kingdom of Ife made brass figures of gods, humans and animals. In the Asante kingdom, goldsmiths made ornaments to show their king was rich.
- Mansa Musa was a rich king of Mali. He travelled to the holy city of Mecca with thousands of men carrying gold to give to people along the way. He brought teachers and architects back to Mali from his travels. Mansa Musa also built many mosques and schools in Timbuktu and Gao.
- By the 1890s, many countries in Europe were competing for land in Africa. They also wanted goods, like gold, oil and rubber.
- From 1897, Benin and other west African kingdoms were ruled by European countries. From the 1950s many African countries won their independence. Today, the ancient kingdom of Benin is part of Nigeria and Asante is in Ghana.

#### What was the Benin Empire?

- The Kingdom of Benin was in a place that is now a part of modern-day Nigeria in West Africa. It is not in the same place as the modern African nation of Benin.
- The kingdom of Benin began in the 900s in West Africa. The Edo people settled in the rainforests of West Africa. An Oba was a ruler.
- By the 1400s Benin was a wealthy kingdom. The Obas lived in beautiful palaces decorated with shining brass.
- The Benin Empire was one of the more advanced kingdoms in West Africa. Benin was a large and varied kingdom. Gradually, the Obas won more land and built up an empire. They also started trading with merchants from Europe.

#### What were the Benin Bronzes?

- The Benin Bronzes are a group of sculptures. They were created from the 1500s by specialist guilds working for the Oba. Some were used in rituals to honour ancestors and validate a new Oba.
- One element of the history of Benin represented on the bronzes is the kingdom's early contacts with Europeans.
- There are over 900 objects from the Benin Kingdom in the British Museum.
- The Benin Royal Palace made public statements asking for the bronzes to be returned.
- Benin Bronzes will be returned to Nigeria despite revelations that the artefacts will become the personal property of a local king.

#### How did people live in the Benin Empire?

- Benin was a large and varied kingdom. Some people lived in villages and small towns, but most people lived and worked in Benin City.
- The people of Benin sold goods to merchants from Europe and to other African kingdoms. Instead of using money they exchanged goods.
- The people of Benin believed that their Oba was a god. He lived inside the royal court in Benin City.
- The Oba led religious ceremonies and also owned all the land in his kingdom. He decided when his armies should go to war. Sometimes he rode into battle at the head of his troops.
- Benin was famous for its craft workers. Specialists in a craft (like ivory-carvers) formed groups called guilds. There were more than 40 guilds in Benin City and each guild had to perform a special duty for the Oba.
- Men were also soldiers. Warriors went into battle armed with swords, spears and crossbows.

#### What happened to the Benin Empire?

- In the 1600s the Obas started to lose control of their people and by the 1800s Benin was no longer strong or united.
- By the 1800s, Britain wanted to take over Benin's rich natural resources (palm oil and rubber).
- In 1897, a group of British officials tried to visit Benin. A group of warriors drove them back and several British men were killed. This attack made the British angry. 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.
- Benin belonged to the British Empire until 1960. Then it became part of the independent country of Nigeria.
- Today, the Oba of Benin leads religious ceremonies, but he no longer rules his people.

900	1000	1170	1440	1472	1700	1897
Edo people clear forests and build villages	Villages become a Kingdom	Oba dynasty begins	Ewuare expands Kingdom into an Empire	Portugese explorers and traders arrive	Civil war caused by uncertain line of succession	British invade and burn Benin City; kingdom becomes part of British Empire