The Kingdom of Benin

Key Vocabulary	
Benin	**A country in West Africa**
Traders	**A person who buys or sells goods**
Edo	**The name given to the Kingdom of Igodomigodo by Oba Eweka. The people also became known as the Edo people.**
Ogisos	**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.**
Igodomigodo	**The original name of the Benin Empire used by its own inhabitants**
Bayeux Tapestry	**Bayeux Tapestry is an embroidered cloth nearly 70 metres long and 50 centimetres tall that depicts the events leading up to the Norman Conquest of England in 1066,**
Saxons	**A member of a people that inhabited parts of central and northern Germany from Roman times, many of whom conquered and settled in much of southern England in the 5th–6th centuries.**
Normans	**A member of a people of mixed Frankish and Scandinavian origin who settled in Normandy from about ad 912 and became a dominant military power in western Europe and the Mediterranean in the 11th century.**

Brass Heads

The people of Edo believed that the head was the most important part of a person, where the intelligence was found. When an important person died, artists would make a head of that person. Obas' heads, and those of gods or goddesses, were made from brass. People believed that the person's spirit could be contacted through the brass head. Artists made their work only for the Oba and he rewarded them with gifts.

Artefacts from the Kingdom of Benin

Masks were made for use in ritual ceremonies and represented a lin spiritual world. This mask of Queen Idia, who was the mother of Oba Esigie, dates back to the 16th century. It is made of ivory and features intricate carvings showing skilled craftsmanship.



This double bell or Egogo, was used by the Oba to scare away evil spirits during religious ceremonies and acts of worship. It is believed to be from the 16th century and it features intricate carvings showing the Oba and his followers.



Coral beads have a special significance in traditional Edo customs. The beads are made from coral stones from the seas, which are polished and shaped. Edo chiefs would wear necklaces of coral beads and the Oba would wear necklaces, collars and crowns made from them.



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Key Events	
AD 400	The Yoruba people start using iron tools which enable them to clear the forest land effectively for the first time. Villages developed and chiefs emerged.
AD 600	The area becomes the Ife Kingdom, one of the earliest kingdoms in the West African Rainforest.
AD 900	The Kingdom of Benin begins to develop, and boundaries are established around the region called Igodomigodo in what is now Nigeria.
AD 1091	The Edo people were ruled by the Ogiso, which means '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 changes the name Igodomigodo to Edo. He calls himself the Oba.
AD 1300-1700	The 'golden age' of Edo. It has a large, powerful army and skilled craftspeople.
AD 1489	It was only when Portuguese made contact with the Kingdom of Benin that the name 'Benin' began to be used. This name is now widely used to describe the entire civilisation from AD900.

Timeline



Religion

The people of Edo's beliefs were centred around a creator god named Osanobua and his many children. 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. Religion was particularly important to the people of the Kingdom of Benin. Ceremonies were led by an ohen and were intended to make the Oba seem powerful and great, as well as to worship the gods. There were celebrations held across the year that linked to the season, including harvest.

The people of the Kingdom of Benin were all thoroughly involved and provided food and handmade costumes for the celebrations. The people of Edo were animists. Leopards, crocodiles and snakes were among the animals associated with the gods.

