



Why have people argued about the Benin Bronzes?

Very Important Vocabulary

Hierarchical: A way of organizing people where some have more power and importance than others.

Trade Routes: Paths used to buy and sell goods.

Oba of Benin: The king or ruler of the Benin Kingdom, who had a lot of power and was respected by everyone.

Imports: Goods brought into Benin from other places to be used or sold.

Exports: Goods made in Benin that were sent to other places to be sold or traded.

Punitive: Actions taken to punish someone.

Colonial: Relating to the time when powerful countries controlled and ruled over other regions.

Exile: Forcing someone to leave their home or country.

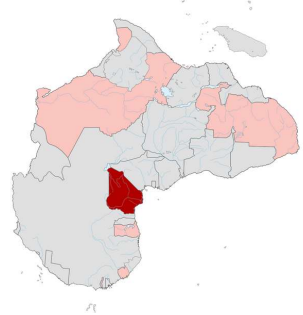
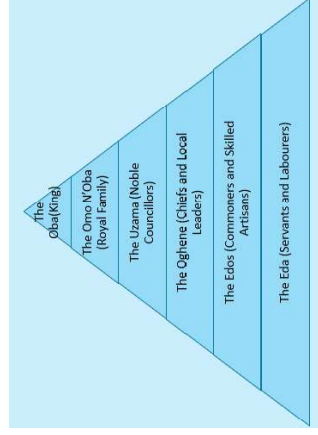
Looting: Taking valuable things by force, especially during war.

Repatriation: Returning something to its home country.

Injustice: Unfair treatment.

The Benin Bronzes

The British Museum has housed many of the Benin Bronzes for more than a century. Nigeria has requested that its Benin Bronzes, which were taken from the country in the past, be repatriated. The question of whether the British Museum should give back the Benin Bronzes has led to lots of arguments. The Benin Bronzes were looted by British Forces from the Kingdom of Benin during a siege in 1897. Whether the Benin Bronzes should be returned to Nigeria is part of a bigger debate in museums about if it is right to keep cultural treasures that were taken from their countries unfairly, especially during times of colonialism or violence.



Religion in Benin

In the Kingdom of Benin, religious beliefs were centred around rituals and ceremonies. The Edo people worshipped many gods, including the Obas, as descendants of Osanobua.

Their gods included:

Osanobua – Creator of the World

Olokun – God of the Ocean and Wealth

Ogun – God of Iron and Warriors

Osun – God of Medicine and Magic

The Destruction of Benin

In 1897, after a conflict between the Kingdom of Benin and British officials, the British launched a "punitive expedition" to Benin City. They invaded, defeated the Oba, and took control of the kingdom. During this invasion, British troops looted and destroyed the royal palace, taking thousands of valuable cultural objects. This marked the end of the Kingdom of Benin's independence.

The Oba – Political Rule

The Oba was the king of Benin and the most powerful person in the kingdom. He made important decisions about how the kingdom was run, including laws, trade, and the military. Everyone in Benin looked to the Oba for leadership, and he had the final say in all matters.

The Oba – Religious Rule

The Oba was also the top religious figure in Benin. The people believed that the Oba was chosen by the gods and had a special connection to them. Because of this, he led religious ceremonies and rituals to honour the gods and ancestors. These ceremonies were very important because they were believed to keep the kingdom safe and prosperous. He was responsible for sacred artefacts and symbols, which were believed to hold spiritual powers.

Trade in Benin

Trade was central to the success of Benin. The capital city was divided into districts and there was a district for: metal workers, instrument makers, wood and textile workers.

In 1490, the Portuguese set up a trading post at Swaton, to the south of Edo City. Benin traded: cotton, leopard skins, palm oil and spices. The Portuguese traded copper arm rings called manillas.

The involvement of Europeans was not positive for many people. The Obas of Benin captured people they beat in battles, enslaved them and sold them to the Europeans.

What was traded? Traded from Benin: Ivory, art, pepper, slaves **Traded to Benin:** Guns, cloth, metals alcohol

Why was trade important? Wealth and resources, access to new goods, cultural exchange

Trade between Benin and Europe: Cultural exchange occurred because of trade. European goods and ideas were influential for Benin, and in Europe, Benin's art was admired.