

LESSON NOTE FOR WEEK TEN (FAMVAR INTERNATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL)

SUBJECT: HISTORY

CLASS: JSS1

TOPIC: HISTORICAL SITES IN NIGERIA: BENIN CULTURE

HISTORY OF THE BENIN PEOPLE

Benin is currently the capital of Edo State. According to one historical version, Benin was originally known as Igodomigodo and was given its current name by Oranmiyan, son of King Oduduwa(Ekalarderhan) who named it Ibinu(meaning land of vexation). Its first Oba was Eweka, the son of Oranmiyan and grandson of Oduduwa. It is believed that its organized government was inherited from Ife, which had a dominant influence on Bini/Benin culture and traditional lifestyle.

Another version of the origin of the Benin people states that they migrated from Egypt through Sudan to their current location. There is yet another story of the origin of the Benin people which states that it was founded by the youngest son of Osanobua, the Benin High God.

Due to its early contact with the whites (in the 15th century), Benin/Bini developed a currency of white currency shells found only in India and the Mediterranean regions. It was a growing city with a monarchical government whose powerful kings(obas) were in total control of the administration of the empire. One of these powerful monarchs,Oba Ewuare, constructed the great Bini city wall in the 15th century A.D.

In 1472, the Portuguese Catholic missionary, Ruy de Sequeira visited Benin and in 1485, it was visited by the Portuguese explorer, Joa Afonso d' Aveiro . These are believed to be two of the earliest visits of the Europeans to the coast of West Africa.

BENIN PEOPLE: THEIR LOCATION AND THEIR OCCUPATIONS

Bini people occupy the forest belt of South-Western Nigeria. The ancient city state is largely populated by Edo speaking people. In ancient times, they believed much in family relation(nucleation) and kingship(monarchic government or government by the king).

They were farmers, busy traders, technologists, art workers(artists) and craftsmen. Bini people became great in art work including pottery (plasticine), bronze casting, ivory and woodwork and, most especially, in brass casting. They made bronze heads, brass heads and ivory masks. One of such ivory masks is the famous Bini ivory mask of Queen Idia which was used as a symbol for FESTAC 1977 which was held in Lagos.

SIGNIFICANCE OF BENIN CULTURE IN NIGERIAN HISTORY

1. The Benin sites are also points of tourist attraction and notable heritage sites.
2. It proves that the Nigerian territory was inhabited by people thousands of years before the coming of the Europeans to Africa.
3. Benin's great artworks and technology show the existence of an intelligent, sophisticated and artistically proficient civilization in Africa before the advent of the Europeans.

4. It is also one of the proofs that there were pre-colonial African societies with well-organized and respected monarchic and centralized governments.
5. The Benin people were the first among the precolonial Nigerian states to come into contact with the Europeans.

HOMEWORK

1. Benin is currently the capital of _____
2. The Oba who constructed the great Bini city wall in the 15th century A.D. was _____
3. The famous Bini ivory mask of Queen Idia which was used as a symbol for _____
4. One significance of Benin culture in Nigerian history is that _____