

**SUBJECT:** History  
**TOPIC:** The Edo Empire of Benin  
**WEEK:** Nine (9)  
**CLASS:** JS1

**OBJECTIVE:**

- (a) Trace the tradition of origin of the Edo
- (b) Discuss the administrative system of the Edo.

**ORIGIN OF THE EDO**

There are two separate traditions which seek to account for the origin of the Benin.

A. **THE OSANUBUA LEGEND**

This legend claimed that the Benin kingdom was founded by youngest son of the Benin high God known as Osanubua. It is said that Osanubua sent down his children to the earth. Before they came to the world the children were allowed to choose anything they like. Some chose material wealth and military glory but the youngest son chose a snail shell. On reaching the world, they found it covered with water and a little bird asked the youngest son to overturn his snail shell. When this was done, sand came out of it forming the land and this made the youngest son the owner of all the land in the Kingdom. The youngest son became the first ruler of the Ogisso dynasty who ruled Benin in the first period of her history.

- B. **THE EGYPTIAN TRADITION:** This shows that Benin came from ancient Egypt. According to this tradition the Benin left Egypt for West Africa long time ago. After a brief stay in the Sudan they headed South wards and made a head stop at Ile-Ife from where they came to their present place of abode already occupied by some other Negro people who had left the Sudan before them. For centuries after their arrival at Benin they remained disunited there. At about 900 A.D, they decided to have a King and chose one Igedo who became the first ruler of Ogisso dynasty.

**POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION OF EDO EMPIRE**

At the centre of the system was the Oba who was a divine monarch or a priest King. He was prevented by many taboos from leaving the palace except on occasions when ceremonies important to the well-being of the state were being performed. Super human qualities were ascribed to him and it was believed that he did not eat nor die and that he had the most powerful charms. He had legislative, executive and judicial powers and had monopoly right to impose and commute capital sentence. He controlled the minor chiefs and could proclaim peace or war and was said to own all the land in Benin. He had the right to impose special levies on the chiefs. He had a monopoly of certain trades with outsiders especially Europeans. He collected dues from those to whom he granted titles.

Next to the Oba, was the Benin state council, which was made up of senior titled chiefs under the leadership of Iyase (prime minister). The council was usually summoned by the Oba on the enactment of a new law and the proclamation of war and peace.

For day to day administration, the Oba consulted with the prominent titled chiefs.

The empire was divided into a large number of tributary units/provinces; each of the unit was ruled by an absentee resident who resided at the imperial capital. He passed orders from the Oba to the provinces and also presents their issues to the Oba. The post of the resident was not hereditary.

- a) Political stability
- b) Economic prosperity
- c) Effective leadership
- d) Military strength

- e) Location of the Empire
- f) European presence
- g) Benin Art- work
- h) Territorial Expansion
- i) Trade centre of the south

#### **FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FALL AND DECLINE OF BENIN EMPIRE**

The kingdom of Benin was brought down by Great Britain in 1897. The reasons for this are ;

- a) Resistance to right way
- b) Political Instability
- c) Economic Recession
- d) Weakness of the Army
- e) British Military Journey of 1897
- f) Establishment of New ports

#### **EVALUATION**

1. Narrate the traditions of origin of the Edo people of Benin.
2. Explain the administrative system of the Edo people.
3. Mention the factors responsible for the fall and decline of Benin kingdom
4. State the factors that led to the rise of Benin kingdom

#### **ASSIGNMENT**

To what extent did European trade with Benin help in the rise and expansion of Benin Empire?