

LESSON NOTE FOR WEEK FIVE (FAMVAR INTERNATIONAL SEC. SCHOOL)

SUBJECT: HISTORY

CLASS: JSS3

TOPIC: EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACT WITH NIGERIA (2)

EUROPEAN PRESENCE ON THE NIGERIAN COAST

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish their presence on the Nigerian coast. They were also the first Europeans to trade along the Nigerian coast. The earliest contact of the Portuguese with Nigeria was in 1472 when the Portuguese explorer, Ruy de Sequeira, visited the kingdom of Benin when it was under the rule of the great Oba Ewuare.

Later in 1485, another Portuguese explorer named Joa Afonso d' Aveiro visited Benin and was warmly welcomed by Oba Ozolua. This visit was the first attempt to establish trade and diplomatic relations with Benin and the relations increased significantly during the reign of Oba Ozolua from 1480 to 1504. During this period, a port was established in Ughoton which became the main trade port between Benin and Europe.

The Portuguese traders exchanged their articles such as beads, clothes, guns, gun powder, cowries, trinkets, iron rods and few other European goods for West African pepper, gold, ivory, slaves, gum arabic, ostrich feathers etc. Apart from trade, the Portuguese government at the time also tried to establish Christianity in the Benin Kingdom between the early 16th and late 17th century by sponsoring the Roman Catholic missions to the region. However this attempt was a failure because of the uncompromising attitudes of the chiefs and natives of Benin. Another reason for its failure was because the Portuguese lacked the required manpower for evangelical work as the presence of mosquitoes and tropical diseases prevented them from coming in large numbers.

After Benin, the Itsekiri kingdom was the next place to experience European contact when a Portuguese merchant vessel anchored on the coast of Warri in 1516 for trading activities. At first contact, the Portuguese traded tobacco and other European goods for Itsekiri bananas and Portuguese trading ports were established at Warri and Gborodo. The Portuguese missionaries later attempted to introduce Christianity in Warri which turned out to be relatively more successful than the earlier attempt in Benin. However, the Warri missionary work still failed before the beginning of the 19th century.

Subsequently, other European countries such as Holland, England and France came into contact with pre-colonial Nigeria. The British merchants came into Benin in 1553, almost a century after the Portuguese and after first engaging in legitimate trade with the West Africans, became heavily involved in slave trade. Dutch merchants started trading with Benin in 1590 as rivals to the Portuguese and English merchants.

HOMEWORK

Write a summary note on early European presence on the Nigerian coast (10-12 lines).