**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BENIN GREETINGS**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

* 1. **Background of the study**

There are many versions of the origin of Benin or more appropriately the Edo people. Chief Dr. Jacob Egharevba account stated that many years ago, the Bini’s came all the way from Egypt to found a more secure shelter in this part of the world after a short stay in the Sudan and at Ile-Ife which accounts take no real cognizance of the culture which migrant people bring along with themselves to their new founded land.

            As a further proof that the Edo people do not come from Egypt, one may say that the Egyptian writing culture is significantly absent in the Benin (Edo) culture. The origin of the Edo people remains on Edo land and cannot have it origin from Egypt which lends none of her culture to the Edo. The nearest in form and style to Edo culture is that of ancient Romans whose law, culture, social and architectural forms compare in similar terms to the ancient Benin (Edo).

            This is not to say that the Benin’s migrated from Rome but it indicates that life springs up at different points on the earth surface and the Edo people cannot be excluded from such a natural phenomenon. In short, no one can say where the people came from the Edo mythology says that Benin is the cradle of the world. It is believed that the Oba of Benin (King of Benin) owns the land as given to him by God Almighty. The Binis are the dominant sub-group of the total ethnic group know as the Edo the tribe of this ethnic group are among the numerous tribes that occupy Edo state of Nigeria as a result of migrations and various quarrels among them in the early century, some Edo’s left the kingdom this exodus explain the origin of several Edo’s tribe, including Ishan Owan Akoko –Edo Esako Urhobos etc.

        The local government areas which are predominantly Benin territory are Oredo having Benin City as its headquarters, Uhunmwonde having Eho as its headquarters, Ovia North East having Okada as its headquarters and Ovia South West having Iguobazuwa as the headquarters, Benin City is also known and called Oredo and it is the traditional headquarters of the Bins.

**WHO ARE THE EDO PEOPLE**

The Edo people of South Western Nigeria are divided into a number of sub-Units. The people of Benin occupied the heart land of the territorial patrimony of the Edo race and they constitute the people of Benin Kingdom. The principal town of the Edos is Benin City and it is the ethnic rally point of the Edo race from Benin City each of the ethnic sub-Unit drawn spiritual substance and derives her sense of racial identification. Benin is called Edo by its inhabitation. The Edo constitute the people of Benin Kingdom whose land is terminous with the present Oredo, Ovia, Uhunmwonde and Orhionmwon Local Government Area, a satisfactory explanation why this sub-unit came to be known by the name Edo is desirable as it will throw more light on those parts of our history which still remain obscure. The edos (Binis) do not call themselves by the genetic name of the race Edo and in some contexts Ivbie Edo. The origin of the current name Edo is fully documented by chief Egharevba (1954) as follows: Edo was a slave to the Ogiefa He saved Eware from a sudden death When he was about to be arrested by the chiefs. In order to immortalize the name of his defied friend, Edo, for the good service he rendered him (Eware) changed the name of the city from Igodomigodo to Edo according to his friend’s name.  The same individual that refers to himself as Ovbiedo (child of Edo) or Ovien Oba which literally means kings slave but in essence a subject of the oba (king) and so not served bounded individual as some European writers have interpreted the expression. The ovbiedo or ovien oba must specifically speaks of himself as a child of his village or his region of the kingdom in which he lives. The major regions are defined by the people in terms of the main rivers, this explain the description Iyeke Ogba (trans Ogba) Iyeke Ovia (trans Ovia) Iyeke Orhionmwon (trans Orhionmwon) and Iyeke Ikpoba (trans Ikpoba)

**OCCUPATION OF THE BINIS**

The occupation of the Binis is mainly farming (Ugbo nagbe) trading (eki nado). There are also involved in hunting )obafi) and crafts.

**EDO SALUTATION**

The Edo name for greeting is otue and the Binis strongly believed that when character is lost all is lost. Character being respect honour and dignity which all make up greeting. It is the natural law that the young one must greet the elder first but this is reversed when the younger one fall sick and the elder has to greet first. Greetings (otue) are peculiar ways of respect to co-equals juniors and elders are held by the culture and tradition of the people.

Culture which could be seen as the general pattern or way of life of the people includes beliefs customs tradition and morals. Traditional greetings differ from one culture to another. The English from good morning, good afternoon to good evening as permitted by their culture and tradition. This is applicable to other cultures in the world but in different, words that might mean the same thing. In Nigeria where there are over one hundred different ethnic groups, they equally have variation in their ways of greetings Benin a home of culture and tradition, where the Binis are in the majority have diverse ways of greetings (otue) for any action exhibited, it has a particular greeting that goes with it.

The focus of this project is on the differences in greetings generally as well as in the diverse form of greeting adapted from one family (egbe) to another, and also their historical background. The greeting begin from lamogun which is solely for royalty those that are of the royal linage (egbe oba). This is unlike her close neighbor the urhobos which has one form of greeting in the morning for example miguo means my knees on the ground. Every family in Benin has its own identification greeting known as (ukhu egbe) which is peculiar to the lineage (unien). Every member of the family renders it to his/her elder in the morning. The same family greeting can still be rendered at any time of the day. This exception will however, validity applies if the giver sender is seeing the receiver for the first time on that day. This links us up with the saying in Edo that eghe a ya rhiorre o re owie.

The reason why a study of the extended family greeting (ukhu egbe) of the Binis is to be carried out are as follows:

5.      Since greetings (otue) is a part of the culture of the Binis, there is need to know the different types and the origin of Bini greetings (otue Edo).

6.      To enable the Bini child know and internalize his/her culture property instead of the good morning, good afternoon the western civilization.

7.      To enable any Bini child know more about his/her own seasons.

8.      To enable the Bini child us the appropriate form of greeting (otue) at the appropriate time event and season.

**STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS**

            Benin as a home of culture and tradition has not much documented facts to show for the diversities in their traditional salutation (otue) from one family to another.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

            Amongst the Binis, salutation (otue) is considered very important because. It is seen as a way of showing respect to elders and it is also a part of the people way of life that is their culture. Tylor defines culture as that complex whole of man’s acquisitions of knowledge, moral, beliefs, art, customs technology etc which are share and transmitted from generation to generation.

5.      This project work is geared towards the expansion of knowledge in the area of greeting in Benin (Ukhu egbe na a tue vbe edo).

6.      It is to enable this generation and those yet unborn to uniqueness of their own family greetings.

7.      It will serve as a reminder to the Binis about the origin of family greeting (Omuhen O Ghe Ukhu Ne A Tue Vbe Edo).

8.      It will score as a resource materials to students and scholars who are interested Benin greetings and history.

**SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

            This research work will be limited to Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State for the following reasons;

5.      Oredo is the central seat of the administration that is, it is where the Oba of Benin (Omo N’ Oba N’ Edo Uku Akpolokpolo Oba Erediauwa) as the traditional head has his throne and from where he administer the kingdom.

6.      Oredo is regarded as the major town among Bini towns and Villages.

7.      All other extended families including chiefs and Enigies Edo (as well as than subjects) of other earthly groups in Edo land have their attributes in Benin.

8.       Oredo is regarded as the cultural centre of the Binis.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Greeting – first words used on seeing somebody or in writing to somebody

Culture – State of intellectual development of a people

Tradition – Handing down from generation to generation of opinions beliefs customs etc

Others in Edo means greeting: salutation in English

**CHAPTER TWO**

**REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**2.2 Introduction**

Edo is a Niger-Congo language in the Atlantic Congo, Volta-Congo and Benue-Congo sub-classifications. It is also sometimes referred to as Addo, Benin, Ubini, Oviedo, Ovioba, or Idu. Proverbs and oral tradition are pivotal parts of Edo language and culture. The Edo people are internationally recognized for their art. Ivory masks dating back to the Benin Empire are perhaps one of the Kingdom’s most memorable legacies. Brass works are also a cornerstone of Edo art and culture. Brass and Ivory works were often traditionally used to preserve history, honor deities, and add aesthetic appeal to architecture. Woodcarving, cloth weaving, and leatherworking are other art forms that the Edo people have excelled at creating. Every year the Edo celebrate a festival called Igue which marks the beginning of the New Year. The Edo people traditionally used a lunar calendar as opposed to a Gregorian calendar, although the festival is now usually held at the end of each December. The festival begins after a period of fasting (Agwe) by the King. During this time, the king does not see visitors. At the end of the fasting, the community celebrates the coming of the New Year. The festival is characterized by thanksgiving and prayers for new blessings in the coming year. It is considered to be the climax of Edo cultural activities.

**2.2 WHY STUDY EDO**

Edo is a Nigerian language spoken by over one million people living in southwest Nigeria. The area that the Edo people reside in is the former Benin Empire and is sometimes colloquially referred to as Benin (not to be confused with the Republic of Benin). Edo is also the name of the State in Nigeria in which the Edo people reside, the political capital for the Edo people and the name of their ethnic group. Edo is one of the main languages of Nigeria and is taught in primary and secondary schools. It is also widely used in television and radio programs, especially in Edo state. Furthermore, there are a large number of “Nollywood” films in Edo language. There are also large amounts of Edo people in the Diaspora in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada. Students may wish to study Edo in order to effectively communicate with and understand a large indigenous population in Nigeria. They may also wish to study the language to learn about the history, culture, art or other notable legacies of the Benin Kingdom. Some historians trace the Edo peoples’ roots back to migrants from the Nile River valley that went to present day Nigeria in the eighth century AD and established the Benin Kingdom. The Edo people, however, believe that they have originated from and lived in their current location for thousands of years. They argue that migrants have moved in and out of the Ed/Benin Empire over the course of the last few centuries. Many historical artifacts also support the Edo peoples’ claim. The kingdom was supposedly first ruled by Ogisos (“god’s of the sky”). The Ogisos established a monarchy that shared many similarities both religiously and politically with Ancient Egypt. They were the political, social, religious and economic heads of the empire. The first king who officially demarcated the Benin Empire in 1440 was Oba Ewuare (Ogidigan). The Benin Kingdom flourished for several centuries until it was dismantled by British colonialists in the 19th century. The Benin Kingdom’s control was spread by the Edos to other parts of presentday Nigeria via conquering territory. The Oba (king) of Benin was also known for settling leadership disputes outside of the Benin Kingdom. Although Edo people are predominantly Christian, some are Muslims any many still practice their traditional religion. Historically, Edo traditional religion was practiced by all of society. In Edo traditional religion, there are two concurrent realms of existence: agbon, which is the visible and tangible realm of everyday life and erinmwin, the realm of ancestors and spirits. Osanobua is the almighty creator God and is reached through deities. Spirits and ancestors are believed to play a prominent world in agbon as they frequently enter the realm to intervene with the lives of humans. The Edo traditional religion shares some similarities with Yoruba traditional religion, particularly with respect to deities. Although the Edo people have been fully integrated into the Federal Republic of Nigeria, they still have a traditional ruling system of Obas and chiefs.

**2.3 THE BRITISH EXPEDITION AND THE FALL OF THE BENIN KINGDOM**

It is significant that the fall of Benin and its monarch should not be associated only with the British expedition of 1897. The Benin kingdom, like many other West African kingdoms in the nineteenth century, was a victim of the nineteenth century European imperialism launched at the Berlin West African conference of 1884-1885. It is significant that Benin had had a long commercial contact with the Europeans. After the Berlin conference, the fall of the Benin kingdom was inevitable. It would be wrong to say, as it is often asserted, that the massacre of the Phillip’s party was the cause per excellence of the fall of Benin in 18971 . By 1884, Consul Hewett, representing the British imperial interests had signed spurious treaties with chiefs in the whole of the Niger Delta in which they (chiefs) promised to place their countries under the protection of the British Queen. As a result of these treaties, protectorate government was set up with its headquarters at Calabar. The Benin area fell within the province of the protectorate government even though the Oba of Benin did not sign any of these treaties. By 1886, the activities of the Royal Niger Company had spread all over the areas surrounding the Benin kingdom. The various expeditions of the company must have created some feelings of apprehension in the Benin authorities. The cold reception accorded treaty agents and the attack on Phillip’s party (at the time of the great Igue festival when the Oba was to receive no visitors)3 were by tradition stimulated by the suspicion aroused by the fear of a possible invasion by the protectorate government agents. The fall of Benin from 1885 onwards, became inevitable and the attack on Phillip’s party in 1897 merely provided the excuse and the occasion for the invasion and conquest of the Benin kingdom. Following the capture of Benin and the suspension of the institution of the monarchy, the indigenous administration headed by the Oba was replaced by an alien administration. The year 1897 thus represented a land mark in the history of Benin. Indeed, sad enough, the Benin heritage typified by her arts and crafts were carted away. They now adorn the museums in Britain and other western European countries. Efforts to have them returned yielded no dividends; not even in 1977 during the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) that took place in Lagos, Nigeria. From 1897, forces were set in motion, which progressively challenged the traditional powers and influence of the Benin monarchical institution. With the consolidation of British authority, the Benin chiefs were compelled to adjust and adapt themselves to the changing political environment. Rather than defend tradition, some of them decided to find a place in the new dispensation and were used as “warrant chiefs”4 by the British. After the infamous British expedition, a consequence of the attack on and killings of some members of the British party earlier in January 1897, and the subsequent deportation of Oba Ovonramwen to Calabar, the British had to find an alternative system of ruling Benin. They found an answer in the establishment of a Native Council. Having decided to set up the Native Council, the British were faced with the problem of the redistribution of power in Benin because they needed administrative assistants. They found a solution in the selection of some chiefs as members of the Benin Native Council (B.N.C.). The selection was, however, not determined by the existing tradition, but was based on chiefs who made an easy submission to the British officials. The Native Council set up in 1897 consisted of the following chiefs: the Iyase, Osodin, Obaseki, Ine, Uwangue, Ihaza, Ima, Obahiagbon, Osague, Ezomo, Ehonlor, Ero, and AyObahan5 . This Council was different in composition from the Oba’s council of the pre-British era. Not all those who sat on the Oba’s council were now appointed to the Native Council. The traditional order of seniority of those chiefs appointed to the council was not respected. For instance, Chief Osague who was the head of the Oba’s council was not regarded as such by the British officers. Instead, the Obaseki, a junior chief, was made the vice-president of the Native Council. According to Igbafe, it would appear that each chief was selected because he was reckoned potentially useful to the administration. This Native Council formed the main instrument of government during the interregnum. It represented a few chiefs of the nobility class in Benin. It combined judicial functions with legislation and was directly controlled and presided over by the political officers, who were responsible for most of its administrative decisions. The Native Council represented a centralisation of power in the extreme, totally at variance with Benin traditional practices. Unlike the Native Council, the preBritish central council in Benin left much of the local issues to the villages under their Enigie and Edionwere8 . The deportation of Oba Ovonramwen as we have seen is significant in evaluating the changing fortune of the Benin chiefs in the new administrative structure. The exit of the Oba created a vacuum in the pre-British hierarchical political system for the institution of the monarchy. It turned the chiefs to stooges of the British as they easily succumbed to alien rule and undermined their positions and traditions of Benin. It became clear to the chiefs that their roles in the traditional political structure had been distorted by the incursion of alien values and system of government, and that they were to adjust themselves to the changing situation. Even before the deportation of the Oba, the realities of the situation were made known to the chiefs. Before Oba Ovonramwen and the chiefs who were assembled at the consular court on the 7th of September, 1897, the Consul-General, Sir Ralph Moor, made the following public declaration: ...now this is the Whiteman’s country, there is only one king in the country and that is the Whiteman... Overami is no longer king of this country – the Whiteman is the only man who is king in this country and to him only service is due...9 With this pronouncement, Moor defined in very clear terms the position of the traditional authority in Benin vis-a-vis the new British officers who represented the conquering power. At this juncture, the question arises, what are the challenges and lessons that can be learnt from the British Expedition of 1987 to Benin. The next section will now focus on this.

**2.4 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FROM THE 1897 BRITISH EXPEDITION**

There was a period of interregnum, which lasted for seventeen years (1897-1914). During this period, the paramount chiefs created by the British administrators occupied the hitherto cherished position of Eghaevbo n’Ogbe (palace chiefs). Tributes were no longer going to the Oba who was now in Calabar, but to the British. There were no more pages to go to the districts for the purpose of getting supplies of food to the Oba. The Oba’s farm, which was manned by free labour and supervised by the Eghaevbo n’ Ore (town chiefs) was now left only to be plundered by the people. Many of the chiefs became poor as the sources of extra wealth were now blocked by the British. Even the daily Eguaematon (court) was cancelled. In its place, the Native Council was created. Only the paramount chiefs were allowed to attend the Native Council. The British took over the control of the affairs of Benin and abused the traditions by the change in power structure and administration. The selected or chosen chiefs became wealthy and power drunk as they became popular before the British administrators, but very unpopular before the majority of the people. Since the British administrators did not consider the laid down institutions of title-groups and grades in Benin, those who would serve them faithfully and loyally struggled to be seen in order that they might be promoted. Hence, the privileged paramount chiefs devoted their lives to the services of the Whitemen in order that they might be seen and honoured: one of such hardworking chiefs was Agho Obaseki, who was made a paramount chief, among several others, in the created institution of paramount chiefs10 during the interregnum. This was the time Chief Agho Obaseki came to the notice of the British. The new structure of administration typified by the Native Council and the policy of paramountcy culminated in the rise and elevation of Chief Agho Obaseki11. The role played by Agho Obaseki was a great challenge to the institution of monarchy in Benin. It was also one in which great lessons were learnt. But even more important was the fact that the force of tradition withstood the storm and the monarchy was restored with time. Herein lies the trust of this paper as we shall see later. It is worthy of note that Chief Agho Obaseki, given the new dispensation, dominated the Benin Native Council. By sheer strength of character, sterling qualities of leadership, outstanding ability to control men and willingness to carry out the wishes of British officers, Chief Agho Obaseki rose to the position of being the ‘mouthpiece’ of the other chiefs. However, he was to become a stumbling block to the restoration of the monarchy. Indeed, by 1914, the British officials realised that the government in Benin had become isolated and could not really identify itself with the people. Therefore, they decided to reinstate the monarchy for a number of reasons. First, the substitute of a Native Council to replace the Oba and perform his duties had not worked. Second, the Warrant Chiefs so created did not receive the favor of the people. Third, the British were faced with the difficulty of making the newly favored chiefs acceptable to the people. This political reality, posits Igbafe, in many ways compelled a change in the administrative structure in Benin. The people demanded for a change of administration basically because the paramount chiefs were corrupt. For instance, some of the chiefs were accused of illegal exaction of tributes, financial mismanagement, abduction of women and the organization of unauthorized courts, which was hitherto not the case in the pre-British era where the Oba exercised traditional restraint. The absence of such a check by the Oba during the interregnum encouraged corruption, which characterized the administration of the paramount chiefs in their districts. However, the British were in the process of reinstating the monarchy when the deposed Oba Ovonramwen died in exile on 13th January, 191414. Given these developments and the popular demand for the restoration of the monarchy by the people, the British immediately restored the institution that year. In fact, popular opinion in Benin (with the exception of a few chiefs) clamoured for the Oba’s son, AiguObasinwin, to succeed his father. This was in accordance with the events of 1906 when AiguObasinwin led other chiefs in a movement to remove Chief Agho Obaseki and restored Oba Ovonramwen. Thus, with Ovonramwen’s death, AiguObasinwin was to Benin chiefs and people, the only logical and traditional successor to his father. AiguObasinwin did not, however, find it easy to regain his father’s throne, for the British nearly planted Chief Agho Obaseki as the Oba. Before the installation of Prince AiguObasinwin (the Edaiken of Uselu and heir apparent to the throne of Benin) as the Oba of Benin, the British administrator, Captain Moor, had to face the challenge of an Uzama chief, the Ero of Urubi. The British wanted to put into practice the ‘Indirect Rule’ as practiced in the Northern part of Nigeria. The only trusted man who could do the administrative work for them was Chief Agho Obaseki. Encouraged by the British and compelled with his own ambition, the Obaseki made efforts to become the Oba of Benin. According to Pa Oghagbon Aiguedowan, Chief Obaseki carved his front door to look like that of the Oba. All other Uzama Nihiron (kingmakers) except Chief Izedomwen, the Ero of Urubi, agreed to serve under Chief Agho Obaseki if made the Oba of Benin. The Ezomo, Chief Osarogiagbon, was a relation of Chief Agho Obaseki. It seems that this relationship between Chief Agho and the Ezomo influenced the support, which the Obaseki had from other chiefs. According to Pa Aiguedowan, the Ezomo, in giving support to the Obaseki said that he would serve under anybody as long as the British had sanctioned that person as Oba. Chief Izedomwen, the Ero of Urubi, was said to have vehemently opposed the Ezomo and others who supported Chief Agho, the Obaseki. Izedomwen told the British officer, Captain Moor, that in the tradition of Benin, it is the same rule that governs the succession to the office of every Uzama chief and the Oba. As the Uzama chieftaincy is hereditary, so also is the Obaship in Benin. According to Bradbury, dynastic continuity was the first axion of Edo political values, and there was almost universal agreement that AiguObasinwin was the only acceptable candidate. The views of Chief Izedomwen were taken by Captain Moor who instructed Prince AiguObasinwin to perform all the traditional rites of his father and become the Oba of Benin. It is worth noting that the issue involved in the succession of Prince AiguObasinwin to the throne of his ancestors highlighted the extent to which the British had influenced the political structure of Benin during the years of interregnum. Traditionally, the Edaiken of Uselu succeeded to the throne at the death of an Oba. The Edaike of Uselu was (and is still) the official title of the heir apparent to the Benin throne and was bestowed on an incumbent’s first son. It was, therefore, surprising that Chief Agho, the Obaseki of Benin, who had become a very powerful and influential chief collaborated with the British to oppose the custom of the land. Besides, he was backed by some senior chiefs who, contrary to tradition, connived to get him installed as the Oba of Benin, but failed. Those chiefs tried to convince the British officer that the Obaseki would be a good Oba of Benin, because he had been an integral part of the colonial government. The reason for the support of some of the senior chiefs might not be unconnected with the recognition the British had given to Chief Agho Obaseki for his role in the British conquest of Benin and his continued relevance in the British administration since 1897. In fact, the Obaseki would not have turned down the opportunity of founding a new dynasty. Indeed, James Watt, then Resident of the Benin Area would certainly have welcomed the accession of the government’s most trusted agent had there been any chance of legitimising it. However, it was soon made clear to him that any move to install the Obaseki as Oba would be strongly resisted by the chiefs and the people. Prince AiguObasinwin was later crowned the Oba of Benin on 22nd July, 1914 with the title of Eweka II. From this time on, the relationship between Eweka II and Chief Agho Obaseki became strained. Also, at this crucial time, according to Chief Omo Osagie, the late Iyase of Benin, Chief Okizi, the Iyase of Benin then, died and the post of Iyase became vacant. As the Iyase (Prime Minister) is the next to the Oba, the British administrator influenced the Oba, Eweka II, to bestow the chieftaincy of Iyase on Chief Agho Obaseki, which was immediately carried out. Although the Bini (Edo), like the Baganda of Buganda, cherished their monarchical institution and were happy at the restoration of the monarchy, they did not like the post of the Iyase given to Agho Obaseki, but there was nothing they could do under the circumstances. The position of the Iyase is the second highest office in the Benin political hierarchy. Chief Agho Obaseki, elevated to the post of the Iyase, thus became the second highest office in the Benin political structure or administrative setting. Thus, with the restoration of the monarchy, the British introduced the indirect rule system into Benin, making use of the Oba and his chiefs as their agents in exploiting the kingdom. However, the implication of this new development is tremendous. First, the Oba ceased being the sovereign ruler of Benin. Second, the Benin Native Council as constituted became executors of the orders of the colonial agents posted to the area by the British Native Council as well as the areas covered by their authorities did not conform strictly with the traditional political arrangement of the pre-colonial period. For instance, Igbafe indicates that contrary to tradition, Agho Obaseki, a junior chief in Benin was appointed paramount chief for Benin. Forth, the roles of the paramount chiefs that became elevated as a result of the political development of 1897 changed considerably as examined above. They had to execute order from the District Officers or Residents who were their political superiors. This political situation prevailed in Benin until 1914 when monarchy was restored. It should be noted that the British did not want to restore the Oba to his former status. The authority of the Oba was severely curtailed. In Igbafe’s assessment, the most important aspect of the restoration is to be found in what was not restored. What was restored was a caricature of the traditional monarchy. There were strict limitations on the powers of the Oba and his chiefs. The Oba was stripped of his ancient power and in the letter of his appointment, it was stipulated that, “except as conceded by the Resident, the (restored) Oba lost all rights and authority over the land of his ancestors, these rights being vested in the English monarch and his representatives. Similarly, the Oba lost the power to collect and impose taxes, the power of appointment and selection of his chiefs, the power to make and change the laws of his people without the consent of the Governor or his representative, namely, the Commissioner appointed to his territory by the Governor-General. As it were, the British expedition of 1897 thus opened a new vista of modern administration in Benin in which the Oba and his chiefs became instruments of governance. Hence, all through the colonial period and even up till now, the monarchy was never to recover from the shock of February 1897 and had never been independent ever since.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE GREAT WALLS OF THE ANCIENT BENIN KINGDOM**

**3.1 Introduction**

Benin City, the current capital of Edo State in Nigeria, is still surrounded by huge mounds of asymmetrical and unstable earth, the remnants of colossal walls that are increasingly taking their place as another ancient marvel alongside the likes of the Great Wall of China, the ruins of Great Zimbabwe and India’s Taj Mahal. Crisscrossing an estimated 16,000 kilometers and encircling 6,500 square kilometers of community lands, the Walls of Benin1 restricted access to the former Benin Kingdom and strictly demarcated its boundaries. Although the kingdom was already insulated by armed guards and solid gates that were locked at night, the elaborate earthwork reinforced security against the adversarial Oyo Kingdom to the south, the Sokoto Caliphate to the north and the threat of marauding slave raiders from Europe. Cited as one of the lengthiest ancient fortifications in the world, archaeological studies estimate that construction of the Benin ramparts started around 800 AD and continued till the mid-1400s. Credited with initiating the multifaceted project, Oba2 Oguola (circa 1280-1295) directed the digging of the first and second moats, after which 20 more were subsequently added around Benin and its vicinities. In the 15th century, Oba Ewuare (1440-1473 CE) would expedite the process, extending and consolidating the moats by adding “great thoroughfares” and erecting “9 fortified gateways” (Alayande 72). Until it was pillaged by the British in 1897, Benin was one of the most commercially and industrially developed kingdoms in the coastal hinterland of West Africa, and is principally celebrated for its advanced mastery of bronze and ivory sculpting. Its clash with the British was preceded by events that took place during the latter part of the 19th century when the reigning Oba Ovonramwen essentially rebuffed attempts by Britain to establish close ties with his kingdom. While increased diplomatic efforts by the British allegedly led to the signing of the 1892 Gallwey Treaty, which favored British imperial interests and proposed greater authority over its subjects, there is some controversy as to whether Ovonramwen actually signed the treaty.

diplomacy would eventually be discarded after an altercation between Benin palace guards and eight visiting British delegates led to the murder of the delegates. The British launched a retaliatory offensive in 1897, using superior military power to defeat the Benin army and lay waste the kingdom. Subsequently, Benin was annexed by the British while its walls were extensively destroyed. Its priceless art collections and carvings were also plundered on a massive scale. At the height of its sovereignty, the Benin Kingdom stretched from the western shores of the Niger River and continued through the southwest in Ondo State and parts of Lagos in modern Nigeria. A picture of an even more extensive empire is provided by Lanre Alayande: At its maximum extent the empire is claimed by the Edos to have extended from the Igbo kingdom of Onitsha in the east of Nigeria, through parts [of] the southwestern region of Nigeria, modern day Benin Republic, Togo, and into the present-day nation of Ghana. The Ga Peoples of Ghana trace their ancestry to the ancient Kingdom of Benin. (72) The Benin earthwork, which reaches heights of up to 18 meters, illustrates an intricate design comprising a sequence of inner and outer interconnecting circles, and an impressive architectural combination of ramparts and moats. The outer walls were of earthen embankments complemented by ditches that served a dual role—besides being an integral part of the walls they also functioned as a quarry that stored material used to expand the walls. Essentially, the exterior barricade was built with earth excavated from ditches dug to create inner moats. Other details of the building process are documented by Fred Pearce who, in New Scientist, identifies “a mosaic of more than 500 interconnected settlement boundaries” that allegedly “took an estimated 150 million hours of digging to construct” (40). Alayande draws similar conclusions in his reference to the excavation efforts of archeologist Graham Connah on the site in the early 1960s: Connah estimated that its construction if spread out over 5 dry seasons would have required a workforce of 1,000 laborers working ten hours a day seven days a week.... Excavations also uncovered a rural network of earthen walls 4 to 8 thousand miles long that would have taken an estimated 150 million man hours to build and must have taken hundreds of years to build. These were apparently thrown down to mark out territories for towns and cities. (72) Unfortunately, the Walls of Benin may suffer the same fate that has befallen several artefacts and archaeological relics in Nigeria and Africa. Scattered vestiges of the structure delineate the extent to which it is in disrepair. While sections are overgrown by foliage, others are continuously pulled down and used for various construction purposes by the indigenous people. Nonetheless, significant portions of the earthwork are still standing and can be salvaged. Though the dikes and walls of Benin have been technically protected by legislation since 1961, they are in urgent need of preservation and maintenance work, and also require more stringent measures to shield them against further vandalism. Without effective law enforcement and financial commitment from government and stakeholders, the task of safeguarding the walls appears to be unattainable with each passing day. There is a disheartening possibility, therefore, that this phenomenal structure—the symbol of an eminent kingdom, an embodiment of colonial opposition and a potential boost to a waning tourism sector—may succumb to neglect and the intellectual failure to appreciate treasured antiquities. And all this in the midst of so much talk about reviving culture and celebrating our heritage.

**3.2 THE LEGIONS OF BENIN**

The King of Benin can in a single day make 20,000 men ready for war, and, if need be, 180,000, and because of this he has great influence among all the surrounding peoples ... His authority stretches over many cities, towns and villages. There is no King thereabouts who, in the possession of so many beautiful cities and towns, is his equal. [Olfert Dapper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olfert_Dapper%22%20%5Co%20%22Olfert%20Dapper), Nauwkeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaansche Gewesten (Description of Africa), 1668.

The kingdom of Benin offers a snapshot of a relatively well-organized and sophisticated African polity in operation before the major European colonial interlude. Military operations relied on a well trained disciplined force. At the head of the host stood the [Oba of Benin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oba_of_Benin%22%20%5Co%20%22Oba%20of%20Benin). The monarch of the realm served as supreme military commander. Beneath him were subordinate generalissimos, the *Ezomo*, the *Iyase*, and others who supervised a Metropolitan Regiment based in the capital, and a Royal Regiment made up of hand-picked warriors that also served as bodyguards. Benin's Queen Mother also retained her own regiment, the "Queen's Own". The Metropolitan and Royal regiments were relatively stable semi-permanent or permanent formations. The Village Regiments provided the bulk of the fighting force and were mobilized as needed, sending contingents of warriors upon the command of the king and his generals. Formations were broken down into sub-units under designated commanders. Foreign observers often commented favorably on Benin's discipline and organization as "better disciplined than any other Guinea nation", contrasting them with the slacker troops from the Gold Coast.

Until the introduction of guns in the 15th century, traditional weapons like the spear, short sword, and bow held sway. Efforts were made to reorganize a local guild of blacksmiths in the 18th century to manufacture light firearms, but dependence on imports was still heavy. Before the coming of the gun, guilds of blacksmiths were charged with war production—particularly swords and iron spearheads.

Benin's tactics were well organized, with preliminary plans weighed by the Oba and his sub-commanders. Logistics were organized to support missions from the usual porter forces, water transport via canoe, and requisitioning from localities the army passed through. Movement of troops via canoes was critically important in the lagoons, creeks and rivers of the Niger Delta, a key area of Benin's domination. Tactics in the field seem to have evolved over time. While the head-on clash was well known, documentation from the 18th century shows greater emphasis on avoiding continuous battle lines, and more effort to encircle an enemy (*ifianyako*).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benin_Empire%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-Osadolor-6)

Fortifications were important in the region and numerous military campaigns fought by Benin's soldiers revolved around sieges. As noted above, Benin's military earthworks are the largest of such structures in the world, and Benin's rivals also built extensively. Barring a successful assault, most sieges were resolved by a strategy of attrition, slowly cutting off and starving out the enemy fortification until it capitulated. On occasion however, European mercenaries were called on to aid with these sieges. In 1603–04 for example, European cannon helped batter and destroy the gates of a town near present-day Lagos, allowing 10,000 warriors of Benin to enter and conquer it. As payment the Europeans received items, such as palm oil and bundles of pepper. The example of Benin shows the power of indigenous military systems, but also the role outside influences and new technologies brought to bear. This is a normal pattern among many nations and was to be reflected across Africa as the 19th century dawned.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**RESOLUTION OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONFLICTS**

**IN PRE-COLONIAL BENIN**

**4.1 Introduction**

For pre-colonial Benin, like other parts of the world, conflicts arose over political issues like boundaries and succession matters. Boundary disputes were common in pre-colonial Benin. This was particularly the case where there were no natural demarcates of the territory like valley or rivers. Where disputes arose over boundary matters, they were handled by elders-in-council presided over by the Oba who was the paramount ruler, but where it occurred at the village or dukedom level, enigies or odionwere took charge of them, while difficult cases were referred to the palace of the Oba whose pronouncement was binding on the parties. Such dispute was first reported to the elders of the community by way of traditional summon. It is instructive to note that persons or groups that refused to honour such invitation or the decision of the elders’ council may be banished from the community – a move that was enforced by the youths (eghele). Parties to such disputes were allowed fair hearing before decisions were made. Upon settlement of such boundary disputes, the actual boundary as ascertained by the elders was demarcated by the planting of Ikhinmwin tree Succession disputes were also common features of Benin early history right from its foundation to the period it became an empire. Even the circumstances that led to the coming of Oranmiyan to Benin and the subsequent reference to the area as Ile-Ibinu, from which the city was said to have derived its name was tied to the issue of succession. However, from oral accounts, the issue of succession was handled by the Oba in line with tradition and custom. As stated earlier in this study, Benin during the pre-colonial period practiced primogeniture. This point has been affirmed by investigators. In the case of hereditary titles, only eldest male children whose mothers were traditionally married to the deceased man had the right to inherit or succeed their fathers subject to satisfactory performance of the necessary rites. Those born outside wedlock were not entitled to succession or inheritance

**4.2 EARLY HISTORY OF BENIN**

Efforts at tracing the early history and foundation of the ancient Benin kingdom had its first fruit in the work of J.U. Egharevba, whose work, A Short History of Benin was published in 1968. While acknolwedging this pioneer effort at documenting the past of the people, it must be quickly added that the findings of Egharevba, which stated that: “Many, many years ago, the Binis came all the way from Egypt to found a more secure shelter in this part of the world after a short stay in the Sudan and at Ile-Ife which the Benin people call Uhe” has been punctuated by scholars and thus doubts exist concerning the authenticity of the account.6 The controversy elicited by this position appeared to have been laid to rest by A.E. Afigbo when he said: …the significance of these claims to Egyptian, or at any rate Middle East origin belongs to wider framework of West African History and Sociology as they are found among most West African peoples whether inhabit the Savanna or Forst zone, are islamized or not. It is quite clear, however, that in the present state of our knowledge about West Africa, they cannot be taken seriously by the serious-minded students of history”. However, one inescapable truth which few existing works and oral accounts about the Benin people have affirmed is that the first of set rulers were the Ogisos.8 These kings, along with their palace chiefs gave directives to the length and breadth of the kingdom and exhibited virtues of valour, wisdom and good governance ever recorded in human history

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**CHAPTER FIVE**

**SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

**5.1 Summary**

It is pertinent to note that this research was to preview the historical background of Benin greetings.

In the preceding chapter, the relevant data collected for this study were presented, critically analyzed and appropriate interpretation given. In this chapter, certain recommendations made which in the opinion of the researcher will be of benefits in understanding the history of Benin greetings.

**5.2 Conclusion**

From the afore-stated, it could be seen that the Oba had been divested of his traditional powers. This means that the powers of the chiefs were also limited considering the erosion in the powers of the Oba, but a few of them, especially the Iyase gained more powers and influence during this period. Yet, the whole people in Benin were happy at the restored monarchy, the symbol of their society, customs and tradition. It was at the coronation of Oba Eweka II that the Uzama Nihiron performed their duty of crowning the Oba29. The head of the Uzama chiefs, the Oliha, did the crowning. All the chiefs, except Chief Agho, paid their homage to the Oba in the traditional way. Chief Agho Obaseki did not pay homage to the Oba because he considered himself equally fit for the position, especially given the fact that he too had unsuccessfully contested for it. As it were, from 1897, the control of power by the Oba shifted to the British and certain selected chiefs led by Chief Agho Obaseki. Hence, there was a change in the Benin political structure between 1897 and 1914, until the institution of the monarchy was restored with certain limitations. We can then see that the monarchy was restored under a new dispensation, which superseded traditional administration. Thus, the monarchy under the new dispensation must exercise powers allowed by the colonial masters. In the process, the monarchy was faced with new challenges as a result of the administrative changes that had taken place.

**Reference**

See V. O. Edo “The Benin Monarchy, 1897-1978: A Study in Institutional Adaptation to Change” (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2001), P. 31 2. Ibid. P. 32 3. See

J. U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 3rd edition (Ibadan: I.U.P., 1960), P. 49.

It was during the Igue festival that the Oba, by tradition, was not to receive any visitors or strangers. The Bini (Edo) people regarded this festival and still do, as one of great importance.

It was supposed to mark a time of rededication by the Bini people to their king. The festival also marks the end of the year and the beginning of a new one. 4. For a detailed discussion on the Warrant Chiefs; see

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 J. W. Nyakatura, Anatomy of an African Kingdom: A History of Bunyoro – Kitara, Translated by Teopista, edited with an introduction by G. N. Uzoigwe (New York: Nok Publishers International, 1973), pp. 101-130 24.

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M. Crowder and O. Ikime, West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule, (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1970) pp. 278-279. 29. Since most of the ceremonies were secret, an uninitiated person, like the present writer, cannot be informed of what really happened during the coronation.