

The Kingdom of Benin: A Historical Enquiry

Learning objective: To assess understanding of the social, economic, and political structure of the Kingdom of Benin and its historical significance.

Read each question carefully. Use your historical knowledge to provide detailed explanations. Ensure your spelling and grammar are accurate.

The Kingdom of Benin, located in modern-day Nigeria, flourished between the 13th and 19th centuries. Under the leadership of the Oba, the kingdom became a powerful centre for trade, art, and complex urban planning. The capital city was famous for its sophisticated system of walls and moats, known as the Benin Walls. Artisans were highly respected and worked in specialised guilds to create intricate plaques and sculptures that recorded the kingdom's history.

Word bank: Oba · Bronze · Guilds · Earthworks · Trade · Craftsmanship · West Africa · Kingdom

1. Identify two roles held by the Oba within the Kingdom of Benin. (2 marks)

2. Explain why the system of 'guilds' was important to the artistic development of Benin. (3 marks)

3. Compare and contrast the defensive features of the Benin capital with a typical medieval castle in Europe. What might be the reason for the differences in their design? (4 marks)

4. Describe the significance of the bronze plaques found in the palace. How do these items act as a 'primary source' for historians today? (3 marks)

5. Justify why the Kingdom of Benin is considered a highly organised society during its peak period. Use evidence regarding trade and urban structure. (4 marks)

6. Creative Writing Task: Imagine you are an apprentice in a metalwork guild. Write a short diary entry (approx. 100 words) describing your day, the techniques you are learning, and the importance of the work you are creating for the Oba. (5 marks)

7. What might happen if the trade routes connecting Benin to other regions were suddenly blocked? Predict the impact on the kingdom's economy and its ability to maintain its influence. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a detailed sketch of a Benin bronze plaque design. Think about the patterns, symbols, and figures you would include to represent the power and history of the kingdom.



Extension challenge: Research Task: Ellie the Elephant wonders how historical evidence changes our understanding of the past. If new archaeological evidence were discovered today that contradicted what we know about Benin's trade, how should historians respond? Write a paragraph justifying the importance of revising history.