

**OBA AKENZUA II AND THE DYNAMICS OF POWER IN THE BENIN
KINGDOM A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT AND GOVERNANCE
(1933-1978)**

BY

PRECIOUS OYEMWEN ENAIGBE

ART2100432

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY,**

NOVEMBER 2025

**OBA AKENZUA II AND THE DYNAMICS OF POWER IN THE BENIN
KINGDOM A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT AND GOVERNANCE
(1933-1978)**

BY

PRECIOUS OYEMWEN ENAIGBE

ART2100432

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) IN HONOURS DEGREE IN
HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.**

NOVEMBER 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **Enaigbe Oyemwen Precious** of the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under my supervision.

Dr. Oghogho Oriakhi
Project Supervisor

Prof. (Rev) J. C. Nwaka
Head of Department

Date _____

Date _____

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God almighty for his grace and protection all through my study in the University of Benin, Benin City.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my profound gratitude to Almighty God for His grace, wisdom, and strength that have sustained me throughout the course of this research work. Without His divine guidance, the successful completion of this project would not have been possible. My sincere appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Oriakhi, whose patience, encouragement, and invaluable guidance were instrumental in shaping the direction of this study. I am deeply grateful for the constructive criticism and scholarly insight that helped refine this research.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to all my lecturers of the department of History and International Studies for their commitment to excellence and for imparting the knowledge that has enriched my understanding of historical scholarship. I would like to thank Dr Iweze for his unwavering support throughout my undergraduate studies. My profound gratitude also goes to Prof. Omoruyi Osunde for his immense support throughout my journey here.

To my parents Prof. Dr. Andrew Enaigbe, and Mrs Enaigbe Mercy Itohan , I express my deep love and gratitude for their moral, financial, and emotional support throughout my academic journey. Their prayers and encouragement have been my greatest motivation. I would also love to appreciate my siblings, Enaigbe Valentine and Enaigbe Valerie.

I also acknowledge my colleagues and friends Blessing, Eghosa, Josephine, Awili, Favourite, Sam, Agofure Henry, Emmanuel, whose cooperation, advice, and assistance contributed in no small measure to the successful completion of this project.

Finally, I dedicate this work to all those who believe in the value of history and the preservation of cultural heritage, as exemplified in the life and reign of Oba Akenzua II.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page	i
Certification	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	
Introduction	1
Aim and objectives	3
Scope of study	3
Methodology	4
Literature review	5
Chapter outline	8
Endnotes	10
CHAPTER TWO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF BENIN KINGDOM	12-29
CHAPTER THREE: THE ASCENSION OF OBA AKENZUA 11	30-44
CHAPTER FOUR: OBA AKENZUA 11 REFORMS IN BENIN KINGDOM,1933-1978	45-60
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	61-69
BIBLIOGRAPHY	70-74

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The history of the Benin Kingdom stands as one of the most enduring legacies of pre-colonial African civilization. At the center of this history is the monarchy, which has functioned not merely as a political authority but as a custodian of culture religion, and identity for centuries.

The reign of Oba Akenzua II, who ruled from 1933 to 1978, represents a pivotal era in this lineage a period marked by colonial subjugation, cultural revival, political reassertion, and the forging of new identities under the strain of modern governance. His reign offers a compelling case study for examining how traditional power structures navigated a world transformed by imperialism and decolonization¹

The 1897 British expedition to Benin City, which led to the deposition and exile of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, ushered in an era of political upheaval for the Benin

monarchy². The destruction of the royal palace, the looting of art and cultural relics, and the imposition of colonial administration under the framework of indirect rule undermined the authority of the monarchy. Though partially restored with the coronation of Oba Eweka II in 1914, the monarchy remained under close colonial surveillance and was stripped of many of its traditional powers³

Oba Akenzua II inherited not only a kingdom but a mission-to rebuild what was nearly lost in the wake of colonial conquest. He revitalized traditional festivals, led diplomatic campaigns for the repatriation of Benin artifacts, and actively engaged with both colonial and postcolonial governments to ensure that the voice of Benin remained relevant.⁴ His tenure was marked by numerous challenges, including internal palace disputes, frictions with British colonial administrators, and the complexities of interfacing with nationalist leaders during Nigeria's struggle for independence.⁵

Oba Akenzua II rule was characterized by his efforts to reconcile the monarchy's traditional role with emerging modern institutions. He promoted education, national unity, and the preservation of Benin's cultural identity. His leadership spanned the late colonial period through Nigeria's independence, a period that demanded adaptability and strategic diplomacy. This study, therefore, explores the dynamics of power and governance during his reign, focusing on how traditional leadership responded to internal and external

pressures of change.

The period between 1933 and 1978 was significant not only for the Benin monarchy but also for Nigeria's evolving political structure. It was an era that tested the resilience of traditional authority amid modern governance reforms, and Oba Akenzua II's reign provides a valuable lens through which these transformations can be understood

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the reign of Oba Akenzua II and analyze how power and governance evolved in the Benin Kingdom between 1933 and 1978.

The specific objectives are;

1. Assess the political and cultural significance of Oba Akenzua II's reign in the history of the Benin Kingdom.
2. Identify the challenges faced by the Benin monarchy under colonial and post-colonial conditions.
3. Examine the ways in which Oba Akenzua II redefined traditional authority to remain relevant in modern governance.
4. Evaluate the impact of his leadership on the preservation of Benin identity and cultural heritage.
5. Contribute to the broader understanding of traditional governance within Nigeria's

historical development.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study covers the period 1933-1978, corresponding to the reign of Oba Akenzua II. During this period, Akenzua II was enthroned as Oba of Benin in April 1933 following the death of his father Eweka II and his reign lasted until 1978. The study focuses on the key political, social, and cultural developments within the Benin Kingdom during this period, emphasizing the evolving nature of traditional authority under changing political circumstances.

Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary sources of information. These sources were carefully selected to ensure the reliability and authenticity of the historical evidence used in reconstructing the events of Oba Akenzua II's reign and the governance of the Benin Kingdom between 1933 and 1978.

Primary Sources

The primary sources include oral interviews and archival materials. Oral information was gathered from palace chiefs, members of the royal family, and elders who had direct or inherited knowledge of Oba Akenzua II's reign. These interviews were conducted in various parts of Benin City between September and October 2025. Archival materials

were also consulted at the Benin Palace Archives, the National Archives, Ibadan, and the National Archives, Enugu, which provided official documents, colonial reports, and correspondences relating to Benin affairs.

Secondary Sources

Secondary information was obtained from published books, journal articles, and relevant academic works. The writings of scholars such as Jacob Egharevba, R. E. Bradbury, Philip Igbafe, and Toyin Falola were especially useful in providing background knowledge and scholarly interpretation of events in Benin during the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Literature Review

Scholarly literature on Oba Akenzua II and the dynamics of power in the Benin Kingdom often explores the transformation of traditional authority under the pressures of colonial rule, modernization, and post-independence governance⁶. The reign of Akenzua II (1933–1978) is widely recognized as a defining period in which the Benin monarchy reasserted its relevance while navigating political and administrative changes introduced by both colonial and national governments⁷.

Historians have examined this period from multiple perspectives political, cultural,

and institutional to understand how the Benin monarchy adapted to the changing dynamics of governance. Early works, particularly by Jacob U. Egharevba, serve as the foundation of Benin historiography.

Jacob Egharevba work in a short History of Benin presents detailed narratives of royal succession, customs, and the socio-political organization of the kingdom⁸. His works preserve essential oral traditions but have been critiqued for their royalist bias and limited engagement with the broader colonial context⁹.

R. E. Bradbury's *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Southwestern Nigeria* marks a significant shift in scholarly focus. Bradbury applied an anthropological method to explore the structural relationships between the Oba, chiefs, and subjects under colonial rule¹⁰. He emphasized the adaptive capacity of traditional authority and the resilience of indigenous systems despite administrative interference.

Philip Igbafe's *Benin Under British Administration* provides a comprehensive analysis of how colonial administration altered the indigenous political structure¹¹. He demonstrates that indirect rule, though purportedly preserving native authority, effectively constrained the autonomy of the Oba. Igbafe situates Akenzua II's reign within this evolving framework, showing how the monarch's leadership sought to restore

prestige to the throne and reclaim cultural dignity lost after the 1897 conquest.

Toyin Falola and A. E. Afigbo. Falola's *The History of Nigeria* situates Oba Akenzua II's leadership within national currents of political modernization and nationalism¹². Falola emphasizes the adaptive roles of traditional rulers as mediators between the colonial and postcolonial state, highlighting how figures like Akenzua II maintained legitimacy through cultural continuity and political relevance. Afigbo's "The Warrant Chiefs" explores similar patterns of colonial manipulation of local authority in southeastern Nigeria, providing comparative insights into the contradictions of indirect rule¹³.

Osarhieme B. Osadolor in *The Benin Monarchy: Continuity and Change in an Indigenous Political System* offers a detailed examination of how Akenzua II redefined kingship to remain relevant in modern governance¹⁴. Osadolor portrays him as a reformer who balanced the spiritual, cultural, and political functions of the monarchy. Likewise, Eghosa E. Osaghae in *Federal Character and Political Integration in Nigeria* (1998) emphasizes the continuing stabilizing influence of traditional rulers within modern Nigeria¹⁵

Peter Ekeh's concept of the "two publics"¹⁶ further illuminates the dual legitimacy that figures like Akenzua II enjoyed combining moral authority in traditional contexts

with symbolic representation in the national political space.

S. O. Arifalo's *The Evolution of Modern Nigeria* and Osarhieme Benson's *Cultural Diplomacy and the Benin Monarchy in Postcolonial Nigeria* extend this discussion into the postcolonial period^{17 18}. Arifalo contextualizes Akenzua II's reign within Nigeria's journey to independence, while Benson explores his international advocacy for cultural restoration, especially the return of Benin artifacts looted in 1897.

Collectively, the literature reveals that Oba Akenzua II's reign symbolizes the dialogue between tradition and modernity. Scholars consistently depict him as a ruler who safeguarded Benin's heritage while embracing progressive change¹⁹. His leadership demonstrates that traditional authority could coexist with modern governance, functioning not merely as a relic of the past but as an evolving institution that contributed meaningfully to Nigeria's political and cultural development²⁰.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Background to Study: This chapter introduces the research topic, outlines the aims and objectives, defines the scope and methodology, and provides a review of relevant literature. It also describes the primary and a secondary source used and outlines the structure of the work.

Chapter Two: A Brief History of Benin Kingdom

This chapter provides an overview of the Benin Kingdom's pre-colonial and early colonial political structures, the socio-political dynamics leading to Akenzua II's ascension to the throne, and the influence of colonial governance on traditional authority. It discusses the significance of the monarchy and continuity of royal traditions up to 1933.

Chapter Three: Ascension of Oba Akenzua II

Focusing on internal and external challenges, this chapter examines disputes over traditional authority, political rivalries, the impact of indirect rule, resistance to colonial policies, and efforts at preserving the integrity of the monarchy. It analyzes how Oba Akenzua II navigated power struggles and maintained his authority during a period of sociopolitical transformation

Chapter Four: Oba Akenzua II Reforms in Benin Kingdom 1933-1938

This chapter explores Oba Akenzua II's role during Nigeria's transition from colonialism to independence, his interaction with political elites, and his involvement in constitutional reforms affecting traditional institutions.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The final chapter presents a summary of findings, assesses the historical significance of Oba Akenzua II's reign, and evaluates his legacy in the context of traditional governance and conflict resolution in post-colonial Benin.

Endnotes

1. E. A. Ayandele, *Nigerian Historical Studies* (London: Frank Cass, 1979), 58.
2. Philip Igbafe, *Benin under British Administration* (London: Longman, 1979), 87.
3. Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (Ibadan: University Press, 1968), 72.
4. Toyin Falola, *The History of Nigeria* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 104.
5. Osarhieme Osadolor, "The Benin Monarchy and Cultural Diplomacy," *African Studies Review*, vol. 45 (2001): 37-45.
6. Falola, *The History of Nigeria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).
7. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration* (London: Longman, 1979).
8. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968).
9. Egharevba, *Benin Law and Custom* (Benin City: J. U. Egharevba Press, 1949).
10. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Southwestern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1957).
11. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration*, 1979.
12. Falola, *The History of Nigeria*, 1999.
13. A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (London: Longman, 1972).

14. Osadolor, *The Benin Monarchy: Continuity and Change in an Indigenous Political System* (Benin City: University of Benin Press, 2001).
15. Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Federal Character and Political Integration in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1998).
16. Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975): 91–112.
17. S. O. Arifalo, *The Evolution of Modern Nigeria* (Lagos: Longman, 1982).
18. Osarhieme Osadolor *Cultural Diplomacy and the Benin Monarchy in Postcolonial Nigeria* (Benin City: Benin Historical Review, 2015).
19. Osadolor, *The Benin Monarchy*, 2001.
20. Falola, *The History of Nigeria*, 1999.

CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BENIN KINGDOM

The Benin Kingdom, one of the most powerful and influential pre-colonial African states, is renowned for its rich history, vibrant culture, and significant contributions to art and governance. The origins of the Benin Kingdom trace back to around 900 AD in the region that is now southern Nigeria. It was initially a small group of Edo-speaking communities that grew into a centralized kingdom. Oral traditions suggest that the earliest rulers were the "Ogisos" (Kings of the Sky), who ruled before the establishment of the Oba dynasty.¹ The Oba dynasty began in the 13th century when Prince Oranmiyan of Ife was invited to mediate internal conflicts in the kingdom. He established his son, Eweka I, as the first Oba of Benin. This marked a turning point in the kingdom's political and cultural identity. Under the Oba dynasty, the Benin Kingdom evolved into a powerful and centralized state. The Oba wielded supreme authority, supported by a council of chiefs and administrative officials.²

From the 15th and 16th centuries are considered the golden age of the Benin

Kingdom. The kingdom expanded its territory, becoming a major regional power. Its influence stretched from modern-day Nigeria to parts of Togo and Ghana. Benin also established trade relations with Europeans, especially the Portuguese, who arrived in the 15th century. The kingdom traded ivory, pepper, and slaves for firearms, cloth, and other goods. During this period Benin became famous for its bronze and brass sculptures, ivory carvings, and coral beadwork. The intricate Benin Bronzes depicted historical events, royal figures, and religious themes. The city of Benin was known for its impressive walls, considered one of the largest man-made structures of the pre-mechanical era.

The Benin Kingdom was deeply spiritual, with religion playing a central role in governance and daily life. The people worshipped a pantheon of gods, ancestors, and spirits.³ The Oba was regarded as a divine figure and an intermediary between the spiritual and earthly realms. However, the kingdom began to decline in the 18th century due to internal strife, over-dependence on the slave trade, and competition with other regional powers. By the late 19th century, British colonial ambitions threatened the kingdom's sovereignty. In 1897, the British launched the Punitive Expedition against Benin after a trade dispute and a violent conflict. They captured the city, exiled Oba Ovonramwen, and looted countless artifacts, including the famed Benin Bronzes, many

of which remain in European museums today.⁴

After Nigeria's independence in 1960, efforts were made to revive and preserve

Benin's cultural heritage. The Oba of Benin remains a revered traditional figure in modern Nigeria, playing a symbolic role in unifying the Edo people and preserving their traditions.⁵

Edo origin and Ogo Dynasty

The Kingdom of Benin was located near the southern coast of West Africa in a region which is today southern Nigeria (the modern state of Benin is further along the coast to the west and named after the Bight of Benin). The territory is a mix of rainforest, dry forest, and mangrove swamp.⁶ Formed in the 13th century CE as a state proper, the Kingdom of Benin was populated by the Kwa-speaking Edo people and covered at its peak an area of some 400 kilometers (250 miles) in length and 200 kilometers in width. The heartland was a circle around the capital, also called Benin, extending some 60 kilometers in all directions and was ruled directly by the king. Next came an outer band of territory governed by royal princes and finally a third ring of tribes which offered tribute to but were not directly ruled by the king of Benin.⁷

It is said that the Benin monarch date back to Ogo Igodo who was reputed to have begun his reign in the year 900 AD. It is not quite certain if that year is the appropriate

year one can really say that Ogoiso Igodo reigned. This is so because Edo Civilization is well over 6000 years old.

According to R.G Armstrong in his book "The Study of West Africa languages" the grotto-chronological period of separation between Edo, Yoruba and Ibo has been put between 3,000 and 6,000 years.⁸ It is no wonder therefore that prof. A.F.C Ryder aptly wrote about the Edo, that "Linguistic evidence suggests that they have occupied this region for some thousands of years"⁹ P. Amway Talbot confirmed that about the seventh millennium BC, the Edo (Benin) and Ewe (popo) and then the Ibo, followed maybe about the second millennium BC by the earliest Yoruba". These suggestions give strong indications that Benin Civilization has grown over a period of some 6000 years if not more.¹⁰ Many scholars have put the origin of Edo people as coming from Egypt while others thought they originated from Ife. Such an eminent writer as Chief (Dr) J.U Egharevba even suggested that the Edo People migrated from Egypt, made a short halt in the Sudan, then at Ife, and finally came to this land where they met an inferior people."¹¹The most interesting point about this theory is that no one has paused for a while to ask where the Egyptians migrated from. No one is really certain about the Origin of the Edo people whose origin appears to have been lost in myths and legends of the distant past. In the absence of any archeological evidence one is forced to have a second thought on this

issue of migration from Egypt. Science tells us that living things grow around fertile areas of the world. As a matter of fact civilization has always thrived in areas of fertile land which sustains life and Edo people cannot be exception to this rule.¹²

The mythical story of creation says that Edo is the candle of the world ("Edo ore Isi Agbon"). They say that when God Almighty was creating the world, he also created the king who was to rule the various parts of the world. These kings before descending from heaven to earth were asked to make their choices of whatever gifts they wanted God to endow them with.¹³ While others chose wealth, wisdom or magical powers, the king of Benin had nothing left other than a dirty snail shell containing sand. The story says that when the king of Benin got to the world which was water logged then, he poured the sand on a point now known as Benin which came to be a dry land. The other kings who had been hovering around without a dry land to settle upon had to ask the Benin king for land. This is the origin of the saying that "Oba Yan Oto Se Evbo Ebo" meaning that the Oba owns the land up to the European country.¹⁴

Whichever way one looks at the origin of Edo both historically or mythically one comes to the conclusion that Edo origin is not known in precise terms, common among the Edo themselves, they say that the original people called Edo grew on this land even

though it cannot be ruled out that other people might have migrated to join the original Edo people. Modern Archeological finds show that the oldest human skull was found in Africa.

Here in Nigeria the Nok civilization has thrown a new vista on the age of Africa civilization. Who knows if the Nok civilization itself is not a spillover of the early Edo people especially as the regions occupied by both the Edo and The Nok are within the same land mass.¹⁵ Regardless the argument or debate, it is undeniable that the migration history of the Edo people has been influenced by a variety of cultural and external factors.

Interactions with the Yoruba (Ife Influence) - The Edo people, seeking a new ruler after the fall of the Ogiso dynasty, invited Prince Oranmiyan from Ile-Ife (in present-day Osun State, Nigeria). Oranmiyan fathered Eweka I, the first Oba of Benin, establishing the Oba dynasty, which still exists today. This connection le-Ife suggests a cultural exchange between the Edo and Yoruba people.¹⁶

The Transition of Benin political system from Ogiso to Obaship

The Benin Kingdom traces its roots to the Edo-speaking people, who initially lived in scattered communities. Oral traditions state that these communities were united

under the rule of the Ogiso dynasty, meaning "Kings of the Sky." The Ogiso kings governed through a hierarchical system of chiefs and established the foundations of governance, culture, and religion. The early Benin Kingdom was called Igodomigodo, and its capital was Ugbekun (later moved to Usama). The city of Ibinu (later called Benin City) was founded in 1180 C.E.¹⁷ The political structure of Benin from inception has been primogeniture, the eldest male Child known as the "Odion" is the head family and all the Odion form a council with the most Eldest of them all as the head known as the "Odionwere". This system was one of the most earliest political structure of Bini prior to the Ogiso system. This system lasted for a long period of time until the founding of the Ogiso structure.

About 36 known Ogiso are accounted for as rulers of the empire. Ogiso Igodo, the first king, is credited with creating a centralized monarchy. Several Ogisos followed, with some introducing innovations like administrative structures, cultural festivals, and religious systems. The Ogiso dynasty eventually weakened due to internal disputes, leading to calls for reform and a stronger centralized authority.¹⁸ On the death of the last Ogiso, his son and heir apparent Ekaladerhan was banished from Benin as a result of one of the Queens changing the message from the oracle to the Ogiso. Ekaladerhan was a powerful warrior and well-loved Prince. On leaving Benin he travelled to the west of the

present-day Nigeria to the land of the Yorubas. At that time the Yoruba oracle said that their King will come out of the forest and when Ekaladerhan arrived at Ife, he was received as a king¹⁹

He changed his name to Imadoduwa meaning "I did not misplace my royalty" and became The Great Oduduwa of The Yoruba Land. On the death of his father, the last Ogiso, a group of Benin Chiefs led by Chief Oliha came to Ife, pleading with him to come back to Benin to ascend the throne. Oduduwa's reply was that a King cannot leave his Kingdom but he had seven sons and would ask one of them to go back to Benin to rule as the next King.

Oranmiyan, the son of Ekaladerhan aka Oduduwa, agreed to go to Benin. He spent some years in Benin and came back to Ife after his wife gave birth to a son named Eweka. Eweka I became the first Oba of Benin. In 1440, Oba Ewuare (Ewuare the Great) came to power and turned the city-state into an empire. Around 1470, he named the new state Edo.²⁰

Ogiso Igodo, the first king, is credited with creating a centralized monarchy. Several Ogisos followed, with some introducing innovations like administrative structures, cultural festivals, and religious systems. The Ogiso dynasty eventually weakened due to

internal disputes, leading to calls for reform and a stronger centralized authority.²¹

Around 1200 AD, the Ogiso dynasty came to an end. The Edo people invited Oranmiyan, a prince from the Yoruba Kingdom of Ife, to restore order. Oranmiyan ruled briefly but returned to Ife, leaving behind a son, Eweka I, who became the first Oba (king) of Benin. This marked the beginning of the Oba dynasty, which continues to this day.²²

Pre-Colonial Socio-Economic Relations of Benin Empire

The kingdom prospered thanks to regional trade with Benin seemingly acting as a middle-trader between other kingdoms, passing on goods which it did not produce itself such as cotton and semi-precious stone beads. Other goods exchanged between West African peoples included fish, salt, yams, and cattle, to name a few. Such was the well-established nature of these trade relations, there is evidence of native currencies being used which took the form of manillas (heavy horseshoe-shaped bracelets), wiring and rods all made from metals like copper, brass, and bronze.²³ There is also evidence that cowrie shells- which came via Persia and the Maldives - were used as a currency in Benin before direct European contact, a fact which points to trade with northern African savannah kingdoms who would have acquired them via land trade routes.

From around 1450 CE Portuguese ships were sailing down the Atlantic coast of Africa and offering an alternative to the trans-Saharan caravan routes and those trade

networks between Africa's interior kingdoms. From 1471 CE, these ships were accessing the aptly-named Gold Coast in the south of West Africa in search of the gold that had provided such wealth for the Mali Empire (1240-1645 CE) and Songhai Empire (c. 1460 -c. 1591 CE).²⁴ Suddenly, the southern peoples of West Africa, who had been at the very end of the trade chain which started in Europe and then went through North Africa, the Sahara, and the West African savannah, now found themselves at the opposite end of a booming maritime trade as ships landed directly from Europe. Benin was not a coastal state but it did maintain contacts there via the port of Ughoton on the Benin River.²⁵

Following the Portuguese colonization of Sao Tome and Principe in the 15th century, Benin traded with the Portuguese, who established a 30-year presence at Ughoton from 1487 CE. The Europeans because he prohibited the sale of male slaves after 1516 CE because he needed them for his own army. In 1514 CE the king of Benin initiated diplomatic relations with the Portuguese government by sending an embassy to Europe, seemingly with the motive of negotiating a shipment of firearms to be sent to his kingdom. The Portuguese were not inclined to arm a potential enemy and instead sent a number of Christian missionaries to try, as had been attempted elsewhere in Africa, to convert the ruler and thus his people to Christianity. The king remained loyal to his traditional beliefs, and although some churches were built and a few Africans did convert,

the project to spread Christianity was largely abandoned for what it was, a flimsy veil of decency to hide the Portuguese policy of stripping the land of all valuables as quickly and cheaply as possible.

Neither were there any attempts made to install any kind of administrative apparatus, an ambition which was, in any case, severely hampered by the high mortality rates of Europeans once they encountered local diseases. It would only be from the 19th century CE that European missionaries really started to attack indigenous beliefs in West Africa.²⁶

The kings of Benin had the title of oba and were considered to have a divine right to rule. The king not only controlled all trade with outsiders but also personally owned the vast majority of high-value goods in the kingdom such as leopard skins, pepper, coral, and ivory. Many rulers are commemorated in Benin art. Ivory masks, intended to be worn at the hip of rulers, show kings with crowns and necklaces of human heads, perhaps Europeans, and signifying either the oba's monopoly over trade or his dominance over foreigners. Kings often feature in the brass plaques that adorned the palace of Benin where they appear as warrior leaders. They can be identified by symbols of their rank such as leopard-spot scarification marks and leopard-tooth necklaces. The leopard was an appropriate symbol for the oba since the animal was considered the 'King of the Bush'

and only the king was permitted to kill one, typically done in an annual sacrifice by the king for his own honour. Other royal symbols seen in depictions of Benin kings are a helmet with coral embellishments and mask ornaments worn around their waists, which are white, a colour symbolic of both purity and the king's counterpart in rule, Olokun, the god of the sea and source of wealth and fertility. Just like gods and the spirits of ancestors, the kings received offerings and sacrifices, including humans ones, after their death.²⁷

Perhaps Benin's greatest king was Ewuare the Great (r. 1440-1473 CE) who was regarded not only as a great warrior but also a powerful magician. He is credited with overseeing a period of particular prosperity and expanding the kingdom to its greatest area but is also charged with murdering his brother and establishing the role of oba as an absolute monarch. Ewuare formed the system of government which would persist for the rest of the duration of the Kingdom of Benin.²⁸ The king was advised by a group of titled and hereditary chiefs and another group of chiefs appointed by the king to govern specific towns, In addition, Ewuare created the convention that a king's eldest son would inherit the throne from his father. The English naval officer Thomas Windham visited Benin in 1553 CE, and his account of the court of the Benin king is as follows: the king sat in a huge hall (with nobles] cowering...upon their buttocks with their elbows upon their knees and their hands before their faces, not looking up until the king command them..²⁹

Europeans were interested in beads, cotton cloth, ivory, and slaves, which they could then trade on to other West African peoples in exchange for what they prized most of all: gold and pepper (the only two goods in demand in Europe). West African tribes sought, too, the fine cotton cloth of India, glass beads, and cowrie shells which the Portuguese brought to Africa. Benin must also have had an insatiable demand for copper and leaded bronze, needed to make the brass for their famous sculptures. The king of Benin imposed strict control on his kingdom's trade, creating a royal monopoly. Indeed, the king clearly had a strong bargaining position with the Portuguese.³⁰

The British Conquest of Benin and the oba's Return

During the second half of the 19th century, the Edo Kingdom was weakened by conflicts over succession. It lost some of its military, political and economic power. At the same time, British imperial ambition for control over west African markets and territories led to increased pressure on the Oba to open the Edo Kingdom to 'free trade' with British commercial firms. In the 19th century, disputes over trade led to strain between Benin and its chief trading partner, Great Britain. This escalated as the European powers moved to divide Africa into colonial territories. The situation culminated in 1897, when a large delegation led by Britain's Acting Consul-General in the region, James Phillips, set off for Benin City despite requests from Oba Ovonramwen (enthroned c.

1888) to postpone their visit.³¹

On January 12, the British delegation was ambushed by an Edo force that by all accounts acted without the oba's knowledge. Almost the entire party was killed, including Phillips. In quick order, a large British military force deemed the Punitive Expedition-was assembled, and on February 18, they arrived in Benin City under orders to invade and conquer it. In time they captured Oba Ovonramwen and sent him into exile to Calabar, a town east of Benin.³²

With these events, the daily routines of the royal court were disrupted and the Edo people were severed from their leaders. Objects within the royal palaces were now the spoils of war, many of which were sold to defray the costs of the invasion. Others were shared among members of the expeditionary force. Still others left Benin in the confusion that followed the devastation of the kingdom. Upon their arrival in London, Benin's royal arts were a topic of conversation and speculation. They sparked immediate interest from museums, particularly in Britain and the German-speaking world, which made efforts to purchase the objects for their collections. Eventually works from Benin could be found in museums across Europe and the United States.

Oba Ovonramwen died in exile in 1914, the same year that his son returned to Benin City and was crowned Oba Eweka II. Benin's monarchy was thus restored, though its

power was greatly curtailed. While the Edo people maintained a strong connection to the oba, the monarchy was reconfigured to be secondary to the colonial system, and later to the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Oba Eweka II and Oba Akenzua II (enthroned 1933) used the arts strategically in their efforts to reinvent the kingdom. They commissioned works to replace those that were taken in 1897 and reinstated some royal rituals, while reconsidering their roles within a modern context. Among Eweka II's first acts was the establishment of an altar dedicated to his father, Oba Ovonramwen. He also erected a single collective altar dedicated to all the obas that had reigned before him.³³

Under the current monarch, Oba Erediauwa, the kingdom has a vital cultural and political life that is steeped in history and tradition. Erediauwa observes important royal practices, including the establishment and upkeep of ancestral altars and the performance of royal rituals. He is also a respected local and regional leader.³⁴ In 1938, in a gesture of great significance to the Edo people, the British returned pieces of Oba Ovonramwen's coral regalia to his grandson Oba Akenzua II, thus restoring some of the sacred force of his ancestors. Upon receiving the regalia, Akenzua II is said to have sung out with joy, "The poisonous arrow has killed the elephant," a reference to the long wait that is sometimes necessary before a victory can be attained.

Endnotes

1. S. Eisenhofer, "The origins of the Benin Kingship in the works of Jacob Egharevba", *History in Africa*, 22, 141-163, 1995.
2. Ibid.
3. P.P Ekeh, "Contesting the History of Benin Kingdom", *Research in African Literatures*, 31 (3), 2000. 147-170.
4. Ibid
5. R. E. Bradbury, *Benin Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1973. 57 - 79.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. R. G Armstrong, *The Study of West African Languages*, Publications Officer, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, 34- 77. 1964.
9. A. F. C. Ryder, "An early Portuguese Trading Voyage to the Forcados River", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1(4), 294-321, 1959.
10. P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: a sketch of their history, ethnology and languages, with an abstract of the 1921 census*, Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1926
11. R. G. Armstrong, "The Use of Linguistic and Ethnographic Data in the Study of Idoma and Yoruba history", *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, 127-144, 2018.

12. Ibid.
13. D. M. Bondarenko, The Benin Kingdom (13th-19th Centuries): Mega community as Sociopolitical System, *The Evolution of Social Institutions: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2020. 337-357
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. P. B. Girshick, J. Thornton, "*Civil War in the Kingdom of Benin, 1689-1721: 1. Continuity or Political Change?*", *The Journal of African History* 42 (3), 2001. 353-376
17. Ibid
18. Ibid.
19. G. A. Akinola, "The Origin of the Eweka Dynasty of Benin: A Study in the Use and Abuse of Oral Traditions", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 8 (3), 21-36, 1976
20. Ibid.
21. D. M. Bondarenko and P. M. Roese, Between the Ogiso and Oba Dynasties: An Interpretation of Interregnum in the Benin Kingdom, *History in Africa* 31, 2004. 103-115
22. Ibid.
23. H. M. Obasogie, J. O. Ebenezer, S. O. Uhumwuangho, An Appraisal of the Diplomatic role of Benin kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era, *Dynamics of Public Administration* 39 (1), 81-92, 2022
24. Ibid.
25. J. O. Aremu, M. Ediagbonya, Trade and religion in British-Benin relations, 1553-1897, *Global Journal of Social Sciences Studies* 4 (2), 78-90, 2018

26. Ibid.
27. D. M. Bondarenko, P. M. Roese, *Between the Ogiso and Oba Dynasties: An Interpretation of Interregnum in the Benin Kingdom*, *History in Africa* 31, 2004. 103-115
28. Ibid.
29. T. U. Obinyan, "The annexation of Benin", *Journal of Black studies* 19 (1), 1988. 29-40
30. Ibid
31. O. B. Osadolor and L. E. Otoide, "The Benin Kingdom in British Imperial Historiography", *History in Africa* 35, 2008. 401-418
32. Ibid.
33. U. Usuanlele, "British colonial administration, development of Islam and Islamic education in a non-Muslim society: the Benin division (Nigeria) experience 1897-1960", *Contemporary Journal of African Studies* 2 (2), 2014. 65-96
34. Ibid

CHAPTER THREE

THE ASCENSION OF OBA AKENZUA II

The emergence of Oba Akenzua II marked a pivotal era in the history of the Benin Kingdom in Nigeria. Born Aiguobasimwin Akenzua, he ascended the throne in 1933 and ruled until his passing in 1978. Following the exile of Oba Ovonramwen, the British established a colonial administration that significantly weakened the traditional monarchy. Under indirect rule, the British controlled governance and trade, limiting the authority of the Benin royal institution.

After the exile of Oba Ovonramwen's son, Eweka II, he sought refuge at his maternal aunt Ediagbonya's residence in Ekor, where he took up farming. His return to Benin was prompted by a summons from the colonial consul, who appointed him as a District Head. He later resided in his grandmother's home in the Ogbe quarters. Before ascending the throne, Eweka II demonstrated exceptional craftsmanship as a brass smith and was highly skilled in ivory and woodcarving.¹

Benin Before Oba Akenzua II Reign

The British conquest of Benin brought great turmoil to the monarchy, casting doubt on whether the Obaship would ever be restored. With the kingdom's ruler exiled to Calabar, Chief Agho Ogbedeoyo, the Obaseki of Benin, collaborated with the British to administer the region. During this period, Benin's royal heritage suffered significant decline, and the traditional institution came close to disappearing entirely.² Upon the passing of Oba Ovonramwen in exile in 1914, the question of succession became a topic of debate. However, due to the prudent decision of a British official and compelling testimony from certain Benin chiefs, the throne remained within the royal lineage. Otherwise, Chief Agho Ogbedeoyo, the Obaseki of Benin, who had governed during the interregnum from 1897 to 1914, might have ascended the throne. The monarchy was reinstated when Prince Aiguobasimwin Ovonramwen was crowned as Oba of Benin, taking the title Eweka II, on July 24, 1914. The colonial administration, under Lord Lugard's indirect rule system, introduced significant changes to the kingdom. Following the death of Oba Eweka II in 1932, the Benin Kingdom entered a new era with the coronation of Oba Akenzua II in 1933.

During his reign, Oba Akenzua II encountered numerous challenges, including efforts by the British colonial government to assert greater control over the Benin Kingdom. This period marked a shift from traditional governance to one increasingly

influenced by colonial policies, impacting the kingdom's cultural and political landscape.

History of the Benin monarchy

What came to be known as the Benin kingdom did not begin its existence as a kingdom in the sense of it being headed by a king or a traditional ruler, as it is known today. It really began as a conglomeration of villages each of which was headed by the oldest man in the community who is referred to as the Odionwere or village head. As time went on, these villages united for the purpose of security against external aggression or for commerce, and the most powerful of the old people was said to have automatically assumed the supreme headship which eventually metamorphosed into what was known as king or Oba in Edo language.⁴ Omo N' Oba Brediauwa in his lecture on The Evolution of Traditional Rulership in Nigeria. Given under the auspices of the university of Ibadan, Institute of Africa studies on 11th September, 1984 said that in Benin, the first to emerge as such a leader almost immediately assumed the position of a king, for by the wisdom he was described as being from heaven {Oyevbegie No Riso. This is the origin of the title Ogoiso which came to be the title of the earliest Benin kings, before the advent of Oromiyan.⁵

There were 31 Ogisos. Even though some historians think that the Ogiso era began about the year 900 yet the age of the Edo people's settlement in the kingdom is over 6000 years. Judging from the long history of the people it is reasonable to suggest that the development of their kingship is much longer than the 900 AD. The much revered position of the Benin Monarchy tends to suggest that the people found themselves inseparable from their monarchy which is regarded as the embodiment of custom and culture. The long existence of their king make it unintelligible as to who came first, the people or the king? Thus it is the belief of the Edo people the God sent them to the world along with their kings. Kings are therefore assumed to be born and not created, "Aise Agbon Rio Oba" ⁶

There were thirty-one Ogiso, from the first Igodo to Ere, Orire, Odia to the last Owodo. The last Ogiso (Owodo) brought a lot of stresses and hardship on the nation he was incompetent. He more or less fell back to the habit of not summoning the state council meeting unless there was trouble. He was preoccupied with the primogeniture law especially as he had only one son who he thought might die before him which might leave him without a successor. This obsession drove him to consult the oracle as to how he might have more male children who might succeed him. In the end, the tragic episode of Ikaladerhan's banishment came into our history. However, Ikaladerhan by a change of

fortune eventually emerged at Uhe (or Ife) as a king with the appellation Ododuwa derived from the Benin word "Imaghidoduwa or Imadoduwa" which is an exclamatory word "I have not missed the path to prosperity" a reminiscence of his surprise at his emerging as a king in a strange land after having left as a refugee.⁷

According to Chief (Dr .) U. Egharevba's historical account, during Owodo's reign, a man called Evian came to prominence and he was then selected to administer the Government of Benin after the banishment of Owodo who was the last Ogiso. We were told that the aging administrator (Evian) nominated his son Ogiamien to succeed him. Such nomination was not acceptable to the Edo people and after much internecine war , Edo people went search of a king and this eventually led them to their exiled Prince now fully settled as a king at Uhe. The Edo tried to prevail on Ododuwa to come back to Benin but he refused although he eventually agreed to send a son if only the Edo people could prove that they were capable of taking care of the new king.⁸ As a test the grate Ododuwa gave the emissaries lice to nurse for three years at the end of which they should report to him the fate of these insects. Chief Oliha who headed the delegation kept his own louse in his own servant's hair and at the end of the third year he was able to produce as many lice as possible to prove that the Edo people who were able to take care of such tiny things as lice were also capable of looking after their king. This fact earned Oliha the

appellation of "Ogelemodu" or Ogele muiro.⁹

Ododuwa having been convinced about the ability of the Benins to care for their king sent his son Oranmiyan to rule, but it turned out that he couldn't rule people whose language and customs were different from those of Uhe. Oranmiyan who married a Benin woman however left a son who eventually became EWEKA I(1200 A.D).

The Path to Oba Akenzua II's Ascension

In the 19th century, disputes over trade led to strain between Benin and its chief trading partner , Great Britain. This escalated as the European powers moved to divide Africa into colonial territories. The situation culminated in 1897, when a large delegation led by Britain's Acting Consul-General in the region, James Phillips, set off for Benin City despite requests from Oba Ovonramwen (enthroned c. 1888) to postpone their visit. On January 12, the British delegation was ambushed by an Edo force that by all accounts acted without the oba's knowledge. Almost the entire party was killed, including Phillips. In quick order, a large British military force deemed the Punitive Expedition-was assembled, and on February 18, they arrived in Benin City under orders to invade and conquer it. In time they captured Oba Ovonramwen and sent him into exile to Calabar, a town east of Benin.¹⁰

With these events, the daily routines of the royal court were disrupted and the Edo

people were severed from their leaders. Objects within the royal palaces were now the spoils of war, many of which were sold to defray the costs of the invasion. Others were shared among members of the expeditionary force. Still others left Benin in the confusion that followed the devastation of the kingdom. Upon their arrival in London, Benin's royal arts were a topic of conversation and speculation. They sparked immediate interest from museums, particularly in Britain and the German-speaking world, which made efforts to purchase the objects for their collections.

Eventually works from Benin could be found in museums across Europe and the United States.¹¹ After the banishment order placed on Oba Ovonramwen by Consul-General Sir Ralph Moore on 9th September, 1897, there was no possibility that the old political structure might be reconstituted as an instrument of British rule. However, certain political development in Nigeria in 1914 favoured the restoration of the institution of monarchy in Benin. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern province into the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria took place in 1914. Sir Fredrick Lugard, the Governor-General was desirous to introduce the indirect rule system in Benin, as he did not hesitate in recognizing the basic fact that, Benin would be an area most suitable and conducive for trying out the emirate system in the North.¹² As Sir Lugard wrote in July 1913 "It seems to me that Benin and its subordinate towns is the chief place

in Southern Nigeria where the system in operation in Northern Nigeria might be successfully tried. However, at this point in time, a factor seems to be a serious challenge or obstacle to the restoration of monarchy in Benin.

The Banished Oba Ovonramwen was Still Alive.

Tradition demands that until he dies, a new Oba cannot emerge. Oba Ovonramwen became seriously ill on 9th January, 1914 and died on the 13th January, 1914 in a hospital in Calabar⁸. With the death of Oba Ovonramwen, the way was now clear for the emergence of Prince Aiguobasimwin, as the heir apparent to be crowned. However, it is important to add that, the way to the Benin throne was not smooth as there was bitter struggle and antagonism between Obaseki and Aiguobasimwin to occupy the throne.¹³ District Commissioner, Benin, F.P. Adams recorded on 8 November, 1910 that "Chief Obaseki has for many years been the most prominent supporter of government among the Benin chiefs and his services have been and are of real value to the government."¹⁴

The controversy started when James Watt, the commissioner of Benin province, who believed so much on the ability of Obaseki summoned the Benin chiefs to a number of interviews to select an Oba. Aiguobasimwin, Eson, Ezomo and Ero were invited. Chief Ezomo supported Obaseki for the Benin throne. Chief Ero told James Watt that, the title of Oba is hereditary in Benin. Chief Eson supported Ero's stand on the side of tradition in

favour of Aiguobasimwin. It is important to add however that, before a final decision on the succession was taken, Lord Lugard sent Colonel H.C. Moorhouse, who knew the Benin native and custom to some extent to visit Benin and report to him. After much consultations and proper investigation, James Watt and Colonel Moorhouse recommended that Aiguobasimwin should be allowed to succeed his father as the King of Benin. On the strength of the above, it can be said that, the principle of hereditary and primogeniture as well as the support of chiefs Ero, and Eson saved the situation, as James Watt could have preferred his friend, Obaseki to be crowned as the Oba, thereby creating more problems. Hence Bradbury argued that, dynastic continuity was the first axiom of Edo political values and there was almost universal agreement that Aiguobasimwin was the only acceptable candidate.¹⁵ Osadolor Edomwonyi said, "But for the wise judgment of the British officials on the strong evidence of some Benin chiefs, the table would have turned in favour of Chief Agho Ogbeide the Obaseki of Benin, who had acted for the Oba during the interregnum."¹⁶

Finally, the Oba was appointed on probation for a year before the formal confirmation of appointment. So, Aiguobasimwin was installed as Oba Eweka II on July 22, 1914 while Agho Obaseki became the Iyase of Benin kingdom. Benin's monarchy was thus restored, though its power was greatly curtailed. While the Edo people

maintained a strong connection to the oba, the monarchy was reconfigured to be secondary to the colonial system, and later to the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Oba Eweka II and Oba Akenzua II (enthroned 1933) used the arts strategically in their efforts to reinvent the kingdom. They commissioned works to replace those that were taken in 1897 and reinstated some royal rituals, while reconsidering their roles within a modern context.

Among Eweka II's first acts was the establishment of an altar dedicated to his father, Oba Ovonramwen. He also erected a single collective altar dedicated to all the obas that had reigned before him.¹⁷ In 1938, in a gesture of great significance to the Edo people, the British returned pieces of Oba Ovonramwen's coral regalia to his grandson Oba Akenzua II, thus restoring some of the sacred force of his ancestors. Upon receiving the regalia, Akenzua II is said to have sung out with joy, "The poisonous arrow has killed the elephant," a reference to the long wait that is sometimes necessary before a victory can be attained.

The Ascension of Oba Akenzua II: Opportunities and Challenges

During his early years, Oba Akenzua II received education and guidance from Chief Ajayi, a trusted associate of his father who held the title of Ovienrioba of Benin. He was carefully instructed in the customs and conduct expected of an Oba. In 1907, while

residing with Chief Ajayi, Akenzua attended the Benin Government School, where his headmaster, Mr. Okai, was a Ghanaian. He successfully completed Standard Six in 1915.

In 1918, he continued his education at King's College in Lagos, where he diligently pursued his studies and achieved success in the Junior Cambridge examination in 1921. This accomplishment marked the highest level of education attainable at the college during that time.

Notable figures such as the late Bishop A. W. Howells, Justice R. Ade Doherty, and Dr. Samuel Manuwa were among his fellow students at King's College. His instructors included Mr. Earnest Ikoli and Mr. Charles James Smart, the latter being a renowned letter-writer in Benin City until his passing in 1966.¹⁸ Oba Akenzua II distinguished himself as an outstanding scholar and also displayed a strong passion for sports, particularly excelling in cricket and football.

Apart from Western Education, Oba Akenzua was very vast in the knowledge of Benin tradition, customs and culture. On his return from the college, he was appointed a transport clerk in the Benin Native Administration. He was later transferred to his father's palace as the Oba's confidential secretary. In the various positions held, he gained leadership knowledge. In 1925, he was sent to Abeokuta to study Native Administration

system under Sir Ademola II, the late Alake of Abeokuta. When he returned to Benin, he was appointed the District Head of Eguaedaiken, although he had not been initiated into the Palace Society or installed the Ediaken. He was virtually in charge of the area of Iyeke-Uselu, covering Usel up to the Benin divisional boundary with Ondo State.¹⁹

Oba Akenzua II performed his duties creditably and judiciously without blemish. He earned the respect of the Colonial Administrative Officers. He depicted all the qualities of a born ruler. He was, in fact, well prepared to assume the throne of his fathers at the time he was called upon to put on the mantle of his forebears. On The demise of his father Oba Eweka II, after a brief illness he was called upon to be initiated into the Iwebo palace Society only as entry to the rest society is of right after the installation, According to tradition, he had to perform the rite of Odafen-Vbonoregae, the Ukonniwebo, Edaiken and Ilyanehien respectively before he was officially informed of the passing away of his father, although he was privy to it before then. After the announcement, he had to perform the rites of the burial ceremonies for fourteen days.²⁰

Before his installation he had to face a dramatic challenge, neither from his chiefs nor his brothers as in the cases of his father and grand-father, but his senior half-sister, princess igniwiyesi. On the ground that she was the first born of their father and therefore devolved on her to succeed their father as the Oba of Benin. After a protracted debate the

Colonial Officers, the Benin Chiefs strongly protested against her claim that there was no precedence of a woman becoming the king of Benin. She further argued that in the event that she as a woman cannot reign as Oba, she should be granted the prerogative to nominate a substitute from any of her brothers. This her new tactics was equally rebuffed and proved to have had no precedence in the annals of Benin history as there had been on several occasions of seniors sisters of an Oba of Benin and no instance could be cited to support her claim several examples were cited such as the one most recent and that of princess Ayubini, the senior daughter of Oba Osemwende and senior sister to Oba Adolo. Finally, The Government upheld the points raised by the Edaiken Prince Godfrey Edokparhogbuyunmwun Eweka to succeed his father as the Oba of Benin. After going through the various stages and ceremonies he was crowned Oba Akenzua II, Oba of Benin on the 5th April, 1933, amidst unprecedented and tumultuous jubilation crowd in the history of Benin. ²¹

Endnotes

1. J. U. Egharevba, *4 Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960), pp.
2. Ibid., pp. 12-15.
3. Ibid., pp. 11 - 15.
4. R. E. Bradbury, *The kingdom of Benin*, West African kingdoms in the nineteenth century, (London: Penguins Books, 2018) P. 66.
5. Ibid., pp. 66- 67.
6. Jacob U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960) pp. 4- 12.
7. Ibid., 4-16
8. E. B. Eweka, *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles*, (Benin City: Uniben Press, 1992) pp. 42-43.
9. F . Alan & R. Charles, *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897*, (Harlow: Longmans, 1903). pp. 71-84.
10. Ibid., pp. 70-79.
11. A. A. Igunbor "Oba Akenzua II of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960: An Era of Re-organisation" (Unpublished B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, 1986) p. 24
12. Ibid, pp. 24-26.

13. Ibid pp. 21-30.
14. P. A Igbafe,
 1. "The Benin water rate agitation 1937-1939: an example of social conflict" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1968, Pp. 355-373.
15. Ibid 361-367.
16. A. A. Igunbor , "Oba Akenzua II of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960:
 2. An Era of Re-organisation" (Unpublished B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, 1986)
 3. Pp. 31-46.
17. Ibid, pp. 42-49.
18. Ibid, pp. 42-50.
19. P. A. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration, 1897-1939: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom*, (London: Longman, 1979) p. 375-376.
20. *Ibid* pp. 351-361.
21. Igunbor A. A., "*Oba Akenzua II of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960: An Era of Re-organisation*" (Unpublished B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, 1986) pp.31-46

CHAPTER FOUR

OBA AKENZUA II REFORMS IN BENIN KINGDOM, 1933 - 1978

The reign of Oba Akenzua II (1933-1978) is often regarded as a period of remarkable progress, particularly in the former Bendel State. This era saw significant advancements in industrial development and overall growth, marking an unprecedented transformation. Many believe that Oba Akenzua I was reborn in him, as his reign ushered in unparalleled development, rivaled only by the city's expansion under Oba Akenzua I (1713-1739), when Ahor Village now part of Orhionmwon Local Government Area served as the city's refuse dump, located approximately 18 kilometers from the center of Benin.¹

The British invasion of Benin and the subsequent exile of Oba Ovonramwen brought lasting changes to the kingdom, with both positive and detrimental effects. During the invasion, British forces looted invaluable Benin artifacts, including bronze and copper sculptures, carved figures, leopard statues, ivory works, royal jugs, lamps, and sacred stools. With Oba Akenzua II ascension, efforts to reclaim Benin cultural heritage

intensified. He persistently advocated for the return of the artifacts taken during the British expedition of 1897. Furthermore, his reign introduced modern governance practices into the kingdom's administrative structure, fostering enlightenment and development. This period also saw architectural innovations, the widespread adoption of brick buildings, and significant strides in education across the kingdom.²

Oba Akenzua II stood as a remarkable symbol of peace, unity, progress, and equality among all races and tribes within his realm. He valued hard work and, within a year of his ascension, instructed his courtiers not to depend solely on gifts and tributes received through their positions as palace officials and emissaries. Instead, he urged them to engage in honest labor to support themselves and their families, rather than idly waiting at the palace for provisions, as had been customary in the past.³

Political Reforms

The first major reform in the kingdom under Oba Akenzua II focused on the Benin chiefs. He introduced new attire, including cassock-like garments that covered the chest, to complement the traditional regalia such as Eyon, Uhunwogho, and Iyenhwan. Previously, Benin chiefs would appear in the palace and at public gatherings with bare chests.⁴ Additionally, Oba Akenzua II restructured the royal harem. Unlike his predecessors, he chose not to maintain a large harem and therefore disbanded and

remodeled his father's harem at Ughekun. Traditionally, the Oba's male children were forbidden from entering the harem after reaching puberty or undergoing circumcision. However, Akenzua II ended this practice, allowing young princes to communicate with their mothers, though only from behind a cloth screen, without direct contact or visibility.⁵

Furthermore, he introduced a uniform for the Emada or Omada (royal scimitar bearers), who had historically been unclothed until the reign of Oba Eweka II. Akenzua II also permitted them to attend school and granted them the freedom to leave service when he deemed them ready to start independent lives, unlike in the past when they served the Oba for life. Additionally, he lifted the restriction that had previously prohibited Omada from growing hair on their heads, armpits, and private areas.⁶

In the year of his coronation, Oba Akenzua II introduced over thirteen new chieftaincy titles, in line with certain Benin traditions that allowed the Oba to honor distinguished citizens.⁷ Unlike his predecessor, Oba Eweka II, who was restricted from doing so by the British, Akenzua II was permitted to create these titles. The British authorities believed that, unlike Eweka II, Akenzua II would not misuse the influence gained from such honors and would remain cooperative with colonial administration.⁸

On January 14, 1934, Oba Akenzua II formally introduced his first son, Prince

Solomon Igbinoghodua Aisiokuoba Akenzua who later became the Oba of Benin to the council of chiefs as the heir apparent and Edaiken of Uselu. This marked a departure from tradition, as the title of Edaiken was typically not conferred on an heir until after the reigning Oba's passing. Akenzua II made this decision to prevent any succession disputes, which had occurred during his father's reign.⁹

From the outset of his rule, Akenzua II demonstrated a willingness to embrace aspects of Western civilization while adapting traditional customs to suit modern times. His Christian beliefs also played a role in shaping his modernization efforts.¹⁰ However, he recognized that some royal traditions were integral to the monarchy and could not be altered. For example, he ensured the continuation of the UGIE-ORO and UGIE-IGUN festivals, annual ceremonies honoring past Obas, which remained essential to the kingdom's cultural and spiritual heritage.¹¹

The Ugie-Oro festival took place in the latter half of the year and was intended to call upon the spirits of past Obas for guidance. A notable aspect of these festivals was that each former Oba had a dedicated shrine, all of which had to be visited during the ceremony. Each shrine was decorated with the staff of office belonging to the respective Oba, and the reigning Oba was required to wear the ceremonial attire of the Oba whose shrine was being honored. However, a significant challenge arose due to the large-scale

looting of artwork and beaded crowns from the palace during the 1897 Benin Punitive Expedition.

Many of these essential ceremonial items were missing, making it difficult to conduct visits to some shrines. The British authorities could not account for most of the stolen artifacts, as many had likely been taken by private collectors. However, in 1935, they returned the crown of Oba Ovonramwen (1888-1897), along with a few other recovered artworks. Oba Akenzua II received them with immense joy, singing *Obi gbEni, sage lemayo* (meaning poison has killed the elephant) while dancing with the crown on his head.¹²

The movement to reclaim these lost artifacts was carried out with great diplomacy, a skill that Oba Akenzua II demonstrated effectively. Beyond recovering some of the stolen artworks, he also undertook the reorganization of the traditional guild system to align it with a more modern structure. Historically, craftsmen such as brass workers, leatherworkers (*Isekpoki*), ivory carvers, weavers, and blacksmiths operated within strictly controlled guilds under the monarchy. Certain items, like the royal scimitar, could only be crafted for the monarchy, and some artisans were restricted from independent trade, producing exclusively for the royal court.

Oba Akenzua II abolished these restrictions and encouraged artisans to enhance the

quality of their craft. He also commissioned brass workers and sculptors to preserve the remaining artistic heritage of ancient Benin and to recreate lost or destroyed works. Among the significant reproductions were the statue of Oba Ozolua, now located at the Ozolua shrine within the Oba's palace, and a relief sculpture of Oba Ovonramwen displayed on a palace wall. These pieces were crafted by Chief Idah, a renowned Benin artist.¹³

Additionally, under the influence of Oba Akenzua II, Pa J. U. Egharevba was entrusted with the task of collecting artifacts from Benin and its surrounding areas for preservation in a museum. A significant portion of these antiquities originated from the Iwebo (Regalia) apartments within the royal palace, while others were gathered from various locations across Benin Division. Pa Egharevba was subsequently appointed as the first curator of the Benin Divisional Council Museum. Beyond these cultural initiatives, Oba Akenzua II was also a devout Christian. He regularly attended services at St. Matthew's Church and actively supported missionary efforts. He allocated land to the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), where St. Peter's Church yarho was later constructed, further demonstrating his commitment to religious and community development.¹⁴

Economic Reforms

With the cooperation of Oba Akenzua II, the British introduced several economic initiatives in the Benin Division. These included timber concessions, royalty payments to chiefs and villages, and the establishment of communal rubber plantations, which facilitated investments in family-owned estates. By the mid-1930s, these efforts had contributed to the emergence of strong commercial elite in Benin. Akenzua II actively promoted agriculture, allowing people to cultivate unused lands to enhance food production.

In addition to his support for agriculture, the Oba also ventured into the transportation sector, albeit on a modest scale. His vehicles primarily served to transport goods from rural areas to urban centers, improving trade and accessibility. Recognizing the need for better market organization, Akenzua II persuaded the British to relocate roadside markets to designated open spaces, leading to the establishment and expansion of markets in Agbado, Ekiosa, and New Benin. He also allocated a section of the palace grounds to facilitate the expansion of the Oba Market.

Furthermore, infrastructure development in Benin City advanced under his influence. Several new roads were constructed, while existing roads from the reign of Eweka II were resurfaced. Notable among these were Mission Road, Akpapava Road, and Forestry Road, all of which contributed to improved transportation and connectivity within the

city.¹⁵

Educational Reforms

Akenzua II placed significant emphasis on education, making it one of his key priorities. Under his leadership, primary schools were established throughout Benin City, with active participation from the C.M.S., Baptist, and Catholic missions. Some of the schools founded during his reign included St. Peter's Primary School in Iyaro, St. Stephen's Primary School on Igun Street, and Benin Baptist Primary School on Mission Road. Additionally, his tenure saw the founding of Edo College, originally located in Iyaro before being relocated to its permanent site on Murtala Muhammed Way, Benin City.¹⁶

From the outset, Oba Akenzua II demonstrated a commitment to adapting traditional institutions to align with evolving societal needs. This shift suggested that the British strategy of investing in his education from an early age was yielding positive results. However, as time progressed, tensions arose between the Oba and the emerging class of educated professionals and commercial elites in Benin. Following his ascension, conflicts developed between him and the younger, educated generation, partly due to his enforcement of modern but unpopular government regulations. Beyond education, Oba

Akenzua II was also engaged in politics, particularly in advocating for the creation of the Mid-West state. By 1950, he was already actively involved in partisan politics, strongly backing the Otu Edo party, which supported the monarchy. His political involvement drew criticism, with opponents, particularly the Taxpayers' Association defeated by the Otu Edo party in 1951 arguing that he was straying from the expected neutrality of a traditional ruler. Despite these criticisms, the Oba remained politically active and continued to support the movement for the establishment of the Mid-West state, demonstrating his ability to balance tradition with modern political engagement.¹⁷

Industrial Reforms

Beyond residential buildings, commercial and industrial ventures emerged to enhance the economic landscape of Benin. Oba Akenzua II's reign marked a significant transformation in industrial development. The former Bendel State, which was later divided into Edo and Delta states, played a crucial role in spearheading these initiatives. Several industries were established, including the Bendel Glass Factory in Ughelli, the Textile Mill in Asaba, the Ukpilla Cement Factory, and the Bendel Brewery in Benin City. Additionally, farm settlements were developed across the state, along with the Cattle Ranch in Agbede, the Rubber Research Institute in Iyanomo, and the Rubber Processing Factory in Ikpoba. The Federal Government also contributed by setting up the Iron and

Steel Industry in Alaja.

These industrial projects not only created employment opportunities for the growing population but also strengthened the economic and commercial activities of the region. The products from these factories significantly reduced dependence on imports, benefiting not just Bendel State but the entire country.¹⁸

In addition to government-led initiatives, private enterprises also contributed to industrial growth. The Ribway Group of Companies established a tire retreading factory, while the late Honourable Festus Okotie Eboh pioneered the plastic industry, inspiring others to follow suit. The introduction of iced fish into the market improved dietary protein intake and complemented the smoked fish supply from riverine areas. Chief Ibru, a notable figure from the state, played a pivotal role in this trade, leading to the establishment of numerous warehouses for storage and distribution. A specialized market, known as "Yanga Market," was also developed along Oba Market Road near the moat towards Ijebu Quarters, serving as a hub for fresh fish and other meats sourced directly from riverine communities.

Poultry farming became widespread, with many households and commercial farms supplying eggs and table birds. The government also took an active role in this sector through the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Additionally, the Owena

River Basin Authority expanded operations by breeding pigs and turkeys on a larger scale, further boosting agricultural development.¹⁹

Architectural Advancement

Before Oba Akenzua II ascended the throne, houses were traditionally constructed using mud sourced from the earth. However, with the establishment of cement production facilities in Ewekoro (Ogun State), Nkalagu (Anambra State), and Ukpilla (Bendel State), alongside imported cement, the use of molded cement blocks gradually replaced mud structures. Today, cement block production has become a thriving industry across the state.

Before cement became widely available, colonial officials introduced burnt bricks as an alternative, but they were challenging to produce and scarce. Due to their high cost, they were largely unaffordable for private individuals and low-income earners. The introduction of cement blocks revolutionized construction, leading to better-built homes and the rapid development of modern buildings throughout the state.²⁰ Building materials are now readily available, including galvanized iron sheets, which were once a luxury reserved for the wealthy. The market is also flooded with expanded metal, iron rods, wire

mesh, and various sizes of iron bars. Many artisans now specialize in welding, producing security protectors for doors and windows, as well as iron beds and other metal structures. These trades are particularly common near roadside mechanics and have created employment opportunities in both government and private sectors, particularly in industries related to motor vehicle manufacturing and repair.

Restoration of Benin Arts & Cultural Heritage

During a visit, Oba Akenzua II (1899-1978) requested Lord Plymouth's assistance in recovering two throne stools that had been confiscated during the British punitive expedition. These stools were linked to his predecessors, Oba Eresoyen (circa 1735-1750) and Oba Esigie (circa 1504-1550). Oba Esigie, who was fluent in Portuguese, maintained regular trade relations with Portugal. Historical records from the National Archives indicate that one of the throne stools was a gift from the Portuguese to a previous Oba. H. Ling Roth's book *Great Benin: Its Customs, Art and Horrors* features an illustration of the stool, described as having been presented to an Oba by the Portuguese ²¹

Oba Akenzua II formally made his request during Lord Plymouth's visit to Benin City in February 1935. Following his return to London, Plymouth took steps to address the matter: A report to the West African Department dated April 9, 1935, indicated that the Oba had seen images of the throne stools, which had been taken from his grandfather

and were in the possession of Ralph Moor. The Oba was particularly eager to recover the smaller of the two stools. Research in a library and the Estate Duty Office revealed that Ralph Moor, a former High Commissioner for the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, had passed away in 1909. His wife, Adrienne Burns, who was his sole heir, died in 1919, leaving the estate to Nellie Newbury.²²

On June 17, 1943, Philip Guedalla (1889-1944), a Royal Air Force Squadron Leader temporarily stationed in Nigeria, wrote to N. Sabine of the Colonial Office after visiting Benin in May of the same year. He had spoken with the Resident, who informed him that two sacred metal seats had ended up in a Berlin museum under questionable circumstances. The Oba had not voluntarily relinquished these artifacts, and Benin had paid £130 for two replica thrones. Guedalla proposed that the Colonial Office should include the stools among the artworks to be repatriated from Germany after the war. The Resident supported this suggestion and presented it to the Oba, who expressed great joy at the prospect of their return. As a sign of trust the Oba granted Guedalla permission to conduct an extensive inspection of the palace and its historical treasures, an opportunity not previously afforded to any Resident or official in Nigeria, Guedalla also remarked that Berlin's artistic needs could be met with the replicas instead.²³

In response, the Colonial Office's letter of July 12 acknowledged the Oba's request

and expressed the Secretary of State's strong desire to fulfill it. However, it was noted that the throne stools did not fall into the same category as other items looted by the Germans during the war. The only viable option appeared to be purchasing them, though the cost would likely be high, and the Berlin museum was unlikely to reconsider its stance from 1936. The Colonial Office recommended postponing further action until after the war, concluding with a promise that every effort would be made when the time was right. In his reply on July 17, 1943, Guedalla supported Sabine's assessment. These documents mark the last recorded correspondence on the matter.²⁴

Vischer and Creasy discovered through Seligman that Sotheby's had not sold all the items from the Moor Collection and that Benin bronzes were widely distributed among ethnographic museums, particularly in Germany, with a significant collection in Berlin. Around 1900, German museums actively acquired many of these artistic masterpieces, whereas British museums often lacked the financial resources to do so. Seligman also mentioned W.O. Oldman, a dealer or former dealer known for handling some of West Africa's finest artifacts and having a deep appreciation for them. Despite Oba Akenzua II's persistent efforts to secure the return of the throne stools, they remain in Berlin. His dedication to preserving the history of the Kingdom of Benin is further evidenced by various photographs from that period.²⁵

Endnotes

1. J.U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960)
2. Pp. 67 - 68.
3. Ibid pp. 66-69.
4. V. Osaro, Edo, "The Changing Phases of Power and Civil Administration in Benin: From Inception to 1987, *Nebula Journals* 5 (1), 2008, Pp. 164-173.
5. Jacob U. Egharevba, *Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960) Pp. 4- 12
6. Uyilawa Usuanlele, Toyin Falola, The Scholarship of Jacob Egharevba of Benin, *History in Africa*, 21(3), 1994, Pp. 303-318
7. Philip A. Igbafe, *Benin under British Administration, 1897-1939: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom*, (London: Longman, 1979) p. 375-376.
8. Ebohon O., *Eguae Oba N'Edo: The Palace of the Oba of Benin*, (Benin City: Eribo Printers, 1979) p. 58.
9. Ibid., pp. 58-61.
10. Frederick Alan, Ryder Charles, *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897*, (Harlow: Longmans, 1903). pp. 71-84.
11. E. B. Eweka, *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles* (Benin City: Uniben Press,

12. 1992) pp. 42-43.11. A. A. Igunbor, "*Oba Akenzua II of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960: An Era of Re-organisation*" (Unpublished B. A. Long Essay , university of Ibadan , 1986) pp . 24-27
13. Ibid., pp. 27-29.
14. Ibid., pp. 26-28.
15. Ibid., pp. 27-30
16. Ebohon O., *Eguae Oba N'Edo: The Palace of the Oba of Benin*, (Benin City: Eribo Printers, 1979) P. 58.
17. A. A. Igunbor., "*Oba Akenzua II of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960:*
18. *An Era of Re-organisation*" (Unpublished B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan,
19. 1986) Pp. 24-28.
20. P. A. Igbafe, *Benin under British Administration, 1897-1939: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom*, (London: Longman, 1979) p. 375-376.
21. V.O. Edo, "*The Benin Monocracy, 1897-1978: A Study in Institutional Adaptation to Change*" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 2001) pp. 39-45.14,
22. Ibid, p. 78.15.
23. O. Ebohon, *Eguae Oba N'Edo*, (Benin City: Eribo Printers, 1979) pp. 23-34.
24. P. A. Igbafe, *Benin under British Administration; the Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom, 1897-1938*, (London: Longman, 1979) p. 298.
25. Ibid pp. 351-361.
26. Philip A. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration, 1897-1939: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom*, (London: Longman, 1979) Pp. 299-300
27. V. O. Edo "*The Benin Monocracy, 1897-1978: A Study in Institutional Adaptation to Change*" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 2001) Pp. 78-79

28. Ibid., pp. 70-77.
29. R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, New York: Nok Publishers International, 1983) pp. 201-207.
30. Ibid., pp. 207-221.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The fall of the Benin Kingdom marked a significant and turbulent period in its history, leading to profound socio-political and economic transformations. During this time, many of Benin's valuable artifacts were taken, and the monarchy's influence was overshadowed by European intervention. However, under the reign of Oba Akenzua II, the kingdom experienced notable socio-cultural, political, and economic advancements. This era can be regarded as a Renaissance period for Benin, characterized by the introduction of new ideas and transformative reforms. Efforts were also made to recover looted artifacts, such as the bronze head of Queen Idia, the mother of Oba Esigie, which was taken during the British expedition of 1897. Additionally, Oba Akenzua II played a crucial role in promoting infrastructural development and economic empowerment within the kingdom.¹

During the colonial era, there was only one catering rest house in the reserved area,

exclusively for expatriates. However, during the reign of Oba Akenzua II, numerous catering rest houses (hotels) were established to accommodate the needs of both tourists and residents. Some of the most notable hotels in the city included Emotan, Bendel Motel Plaza, Central Palace, Palm Royal, Basula, and Noruwa². The city's expansion made it increasingly difficult to define its exact boundaries, as well as those of other towns in Bendel State. Infrastructure improvements were significant, with roads being widened and paved, and large-scale drainage projects undertaken by both the state and local governments. In the past, there was no electricity supply, but over time, homes and streets were electrified. The State Government created the Rural Electrification Board to provide power to rural areas, while the National Electricity Power Authority managed electricity distribution in larger towns.³

Before Oba Akenzua II's reign, the supply of pipe-borne water in the city was inadequate, as there was only one source and a single reservoir to serve the population. As a result, residents often supplemented their water needs by fetching water from the Ikpoba and Ogba streams. However, with the creation of the former Bendel State, multiple new water sources were introduced to improve supply. Several boreholes and water tanks were constructed at key locations, including Iyaro, Ugbowo, Ikpoba Hill, East Circular, and the Ikpoba Dam project, which was initiated by the state government

during his reign.

Before his time, many residents of Benin had never seen an airplane, as air travel was largely unfamiliar to those who had never left the city. However, the construction of an airport in Benin City changed this, enabling regular flights and making travel in and out of the state more accessible.⁴

During the colonial era, the timber industry was dominated by expatriates and their agents. However, under Oba Akenzua II's reign, access to this industry was extended to the local population. In addition to the long-established African Timber and Plywood Company sawmill in Sapele, indigenous sawmills were developed, reducing reliance on traditional pit sawmilling. The 1950s saw significant booms in the rubber and timber industries, with Abura timber surpassing iroko and Mahogany in demand. Economic prosperity was so pronounced that some contractors were said to use currency notes as cigarettes, giving rise to the popular slogan, "Money is no problem."⁵

Infrastructure development also progressed during this period. Ogbe Stadium, originally built by the Benin Divisional Council, was later taken over and renovated by Governor Ogbemudia's administration in 1968. Under his leadership, the stadium was upgraded to a model standard, inspiring similar developments in other states. His movement also advanced sports education by establishing the Physical Education College

in Afuze, which played a key role in producing talented athletes and contributing to Bendel State's sporting achievements.⁶

Market development was another significant aspect of this era. Aghado Market on Akpakpava Street in Benin City was reconstructed and reopened by Oba Akenzua II on January 17, 1971, replacing the previous market that had stood since January 17, 1917. To accommodate the growing population, several modern markets were also established, including Edo Market on Upper Mission Road, Uwa Market near the Nigerian Television Station, Osa Market at the Sakpoba/Second East Circular Road junction, Ogiso (New)

Market along Second East Circular Road, as well as the now-defunct Oliha Market and Ogida Market on Textile Mill Road.⁷

The introduction of radio and television brought significant changes to the state, making these technologies widely available in both urban and rural areas. Traditional gramophones which required manual winding, were gradually replaced by record changers and stereo systems. To support the commercial sector, the Benue Development Corporation established a brewery at Ikpoba Hill along the Benin-Agbor Road for the production of Crystal Lager Beer. Nearby, Guinness Nigeria Limited set up a brewery for Guinness Stout and Harp Lager Beer. Additionally, along the Benin-Sapele Road, beverage production facilities were established, including plants for Coca-Cola, Sprite, Crest,

Bitter Lemon, and other soft drinks. Chief Gabriel Igbinedion, the Esama of Benin, also founded a brewery for Canada Dry products along this route.⁸

The transportation sector experienced significant expansion. While established motor companies such as Niger Motors, Joe Allen Limited, C.F.A.O., and S.C.O.A. had been in operation before Oba Akenzua II's reign in 1933, the increasing demand for transportation following the creation of Bendel State led to the emergence of new companies. Among them were Mid-Motors, founded by Chief Gabriel Igbinedion, as well as Union Trading Company, Mandilas Company, WATECO, Leventis Motors, BEWAC Motor Company, and RUTAM, among others.

Alongside these developments, the printing and publishing industries flourished. The Government Printing Press was established following the creation of the state, and other printing houses such as Ribway Printing Press and the Ethiope Publishing Company, founded by the state government, became prominent. Numerous other printing firms also emerged, particularly in Benin City, to meet the growing demand for books and put actions. Leading the industry was The Nigerian Observer, which published daily, Sunday, and sports newspapers, along with several other publications.

The rapid increase in motor vehicle use led to significant traffic congestion in cities such as Benin and Warri, a challenge that had been previously unimaginable. The

heightened demand for transportation, driven by business expansion, resulted in frequent traffic jams. As the situation worsened and became difficult for the police to manage, traffic lights are installed at major road junctions, and traffic wardens were stationed at key locations, including school gates and highways. These measures significantly improved traffic flow and helped reduce the number of accidents in urban areas.⁹

Before the reign of Oba Akenzua II, banking facilities were nonexistent in the region. However, with the rapid expansion of commercial activities, several banks were established in the state capital and other towns to meet the growing financial needs of the people. Among these were the first Bank of Nigeria (formerly British West African Bank), the National Bank, the African Continental Bank, the United Bank for Africa, the New Nigeria Bank, the Union Bank (formerly Barclays Bank), the Co-operative Bank, the Federal Mortgage Bank, the International Bank, and the Central Bank. These institutions played a crucial role in driving industrial growth and supporting commercial enterprises in the state. Additionally, the discovery and exploitation of oil attracted numerous oil prospecting companies, placing the state at the center of Nigeria's petroleum industry. As a result, Warri became widely recognized as the "Oil City," solidifying the country's status as a major oil producer on the global stage.¹⁰

Recreational and entertainment facilities also expanded during this period.

In addition to the first and oldest cinema, Olowu Cinema House, several others were established across different localities, providing leisure opportunities for residents. These included Anotan Cinema, Olympia Cinema in Sapele, Regent Cinema, and Atlantic Cinema in Benin City, among others. Furthermore, the establishment of a zoo with the acquisition of about 200 animals by the movement and the establishment of an amusement park by Sunday Omoregie Iyamu. The zoo housed a variety of animals and birds, attracting both residents and visitors.¹¹

Oba Akenzua II also played a significant role in Nigeria's political development. He maintained strong alliances with key nationalists such as Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe, who championed the country's independence through the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) from 1944 to 1966. Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, Oba Akenzua II remained an influential figure in governance until the military takeover, which led to the dissolution of political parties and the removal of political office holders.

Despite these changes, he adapted to the evolving political landscape and was instrumental in navigating the country's transition from colonial rule to a partisan political system between 1951 and 1966. His reign was a period of both continuity and transformation in Benin society. As a monarch with a Western education, he successfully balanced tradition with modernity, integrating into the traditional elite while also embracing monetization. His ability to preserve cultural heritage while facilitating

development made his rule one of reorganization and progress in Benin's history.¹² When Oba Akenzua II passed away in 1978, he was mourned worldwide for his remarkable contributions. He left behind a lasting legacy and an enviable heritage for his son, Oba Erediauwa. His reign remains a significant chapter in Benin's history, and the Edo people continue to remember him as a father, builder, and visionary ruler whose impact endures through time.

Endnotes

1. Jacob U. Esharevba, *Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960) pp. 11-27.
2. Ibid. 15-19.
3. An Era one, "Oba kenzua IT of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960:1986) pp. 31-46.
4. An Era of Re-organisation" (Unpublished B.A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, Prend Retraioigr, Lostr: Otor Uitreadhae, 1911, . 5610.
2. Ibid pp. 60-67.
3. Ebeigbe, Sweet Ufumwen: Practical Assessment of the Modes of Visual Narratives in the Art of Benin in Nigeria, in: *Studies in Visual Arts and Communication: an international journal* Vol. 2, No 1, 2015. Pp. 7-13
4. W. Schonfeld, "Anthropomorphic Masks in Ivory from Benin, New York: Department of Art History, Columbia University". Unpublished M.A. Thesis, 1979. Pp. 23-30.
5. Igunbor A. A., "*Oba Akenzua II of Benin and the Colonial Government, 1933-1960: An Era of Re-organisation*" (Unpublished B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, 1986) Pp. 31-46.
6. Ibid pp. 37-40.
7. The British Museum. Collection online. Search Oldman Benin www.britishmuseum.org Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. Chief S.O.

Alonge: Photographer to the Royal Court of Benin, Nigeria. <http://africa.si.edu>.

8. Flora S. Kaplan, Benin art revisited: Photographs and museum collections, *Visual Anthropology*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Published online, 2010 Pp. 113-127.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 141- 145.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source (Oral Interview)

Name	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Mrs. Osarumwense Obadiaru	65	Market Leader	Ekiosa Market, Benin City	3 September 2025
Prince Eweka Akenzua	68	Member of the Royal Family	Benin City	20 September 2025
Mrs. Iyobosa Edeki	77	Retired Teacher Palace Aide	Oredo, Benin City	10 October 2025
Chief Nosakhare Obazee	81	Traditional Historian	Igun Street, Benin City	24 October 2025
Chief Osaro Igbinovia	84	Palace Chief,	Benin Traditional Council Uselu, Benin City	15 October 2025

Government/Agency Publications

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development. Youth Participation in Politics in the Niger Delta. Abuja: ACLSD, 2022.

Culture of the Edo People. Benin City: Edo State Government Press, 2020.

Lihanve, J. O. *Youth and Nation: Who Is Young to Run? The Non-Political Participation Argument. Abuja: Federal Government of Nigeria, 2016.*

The Path Forward for Edo State: Empowering Youths and the People through Vocational Education and Sustainable Growth. Benin City: Edo State Press, 2023.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Books

Abubakar, M. *The Nigerian Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation.* Lagos: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2002.

Adeoye, A. A. *Democracy and Electoral Politics in Nigeria.* Ibadan: University Press, 2020.

Adewale, A. *Democracy and Political Participation.* Lagos: Open Society Initiative for West Africa, 2016.

Adeyemi, D. *Political Participation and the Nigerian Youth.* Lagos: Heritage Publishers, 2013.

Aderia, O. *Democracy and Youth in Nigeria.* Lagos: African Heritage Press, 2021.

Afigbo, A. E. *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929.* London: Longman, 1972.

Agbontaen, K. A. *Pre-Colonial Benin: Historical and Cultural Perspectives.* Benin City: Ethiope Publishing, 2003.

Aisien, E. *Oba Erediauwa: The Prince and the Palace.* Benin City: Mindex Publishing, 2004.

Aisien, Ekhaguosa, and Osarhieme B. Osadolor. *Perspectives on Benin Kingship.* Benin City: Mindex Publishing, 2010.

Akinyede, E. *The Dynamics of Youth Protest in Nigeria.* Lagos: Sunrise Press, 2021.

Arifalo, S. O. *The Evolution of Modern Nigeria.* Lagos: Longman, 1982.

Ato, A. *Youth and the Politics of Political Participation in Nigeria.* Lagos: Nigerian Political Studies Institute, 2020.

Atoyebi, J. A. *Traditional Rulership in Contemporary Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2006.

Awosanya, O. *Path to Nigerian Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.

Bello-Imam, B. B. *Political Parties and Democratic Structures in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press, 2018.

Bradbury, R. E. *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Southwestern Nigeria*. London: International African Institute, 1957.

Crowder, M. *The Story of Nigeria*. London: Faber and Faber, 1978.

Egharevba, J. U. *A Short History of Benin*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968.

Etimika, I. *Power and Politics in Nigeria: History and Perspectives*. Benin City: Anwise Hill University Press, 2002.

Falola, T. *The History of Nigeria*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Falola, T, and Matthew M. Heaton. *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Faloye, I., and, A. O, *Youth and Conflict in Nigeria*. Abuja: Nigeria Conflict Studies Institute, 2019.

Francis, O., and S., *Youth Identity and Politics in Nigeria*. Lagos: Harmony Press, 2020.

Hodgkin, T. *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Igbafe, Philip A. *Benin Under British Administration: The Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom*. London: Longman, 1979.

Igbafe, Philip A. *The Fall of Benin: An Historical Analysis*. Benin City: University of Benin Press, 1977.

Idowu, O. *Youth, Democracy, and Political Engagement in Nigeria*. Lagos: Nigerian

Political Media Press, 2021.

Independent Television Radio. *Youth and Politics in Africa: The Struggle for Inclusion*. Benin City: ITV Publications, 2019.

Joe, E. D., ed. *Youth and Political Participation in AA of 7 Cities*. Abuja: Tilden Press, 2021.

Jones, J. A. *Youth, Governance, and Political Activism in Africa*. London: Cullen Academic, 2011.

Joseph, R. *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Essays*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Lawal, B. *The Oba's Palace: Art, Politics, and Power in Benin*. Lagos: National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 2005.

Lihanve, J. O. *Youth and Elections: Studies in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2000.

Okoto, E. E. *Women and Leadership in Nigerian Colleges and Prospects*. Abuja: Nigerian Women's Leadership Institute, 2022.

Onovughu, O. *Youth, Media, and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Abuja: Nigeria Media Institute, 2020.

Osadolor, O. B. *Cultural Diplomacy and the Benin Monarchy in Postcolonial Nigeria*. Benin City: Benin Historical Review, 2015.

Osadolor, O. B. *Edo and the Development of Nigerian Nationalism*. Benin City: Bael Printing House, 1985.

Osadolor, O. B. *The Benin Monarchy: Continuity and Change in an Indigenous Political System*. Benin City: University of Benin Press, 2001.

Osaghae, Eghosa E. *Federal Character and Political Integration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1998.

Ryder, A. F. C. *Benin and the Europeans, 1485–1897*. London: Longman, 1969.

Ugo, P., and Lord Macaulay-Tewogbade. *African Youths and Politics in a Globalized World*. Lanham: Asgar Publishing, 2015.

Ugo, P., and Thamulo I. L. *African Youths, Justice in a Globalized World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Uya, Okon E. *African History: Some Problems in Methodology and Perspectives*. Calabar: CATS Publishers, 1984.

Uyi, I. O. *Youth Leadership and Political Change in Edo State: The Rise of Natasha Osawaru*. Benin City: Edo State Press, 2023.

Walker, Robin. *When We Ruled: The Ancient and Mediaeval History of Black Civilisations*. London: Every Generation Media, 2006.

Articles in Journals

Aderemi, A. “The Rise of Youth-Led Activism in Nigeria: The Impact of the Not Too Young to Run Bill and #EndSARS.” *Journal of African Studies* 21, no. 5 (2021): 122–136.

Agunine, N. “Youth, Social Media, and Political Protest in Nigeria: The Role of #EndSARS and Other Youth Movements.” *African Journal of Political Science* 15, no. 2 (2020): 45–59.

Ehigie, D. I., and A. S. Yusuf. “The Impact of National Youth Policy on Youth Political Participation in Nigeria.” *Journal of Nigerian Political Studies* 28, no. 1 (2023): 67–81.

Ekeh, Peter P. “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975): 91–112.

“The Impact of Youth Representation in Edo State Politics: Natasha Osawaru’s Legislative Journey.” *Journal of Nigerian Political Studies* 19, no. 2 (2023): 99–115.

Ikime, O. *Groundwork of Nigerian History*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980.

Online Materials

“Online Article: Youth Engagement in Edo State Politics.” Accessed October 25, 2025.