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A STUDY IN BENIN GUILD SYSTEM AND THE MONARCHY FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO 1897

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the guild system in Benin and the monarchy. It discusses the role of kings in the introduction of the guilds in Benin. The types and the organization of the guilds in Benin also came into focus. It analyzes the impact of the civil war in the 17th century on the guilds and the negative effects of the 1897 invasion of Benin on the guilds development. It also examines the guilds as a contributing factor to the survival of the kingdom. The study relied on both primary sources like oral interview and archival materials and secondary sources like books, theses, articles, newspapers, journals etc. The study found that Ogiso Ere introduced guilds into Benin and other kings built on it. The study demonstrated that there were at least sixty-eight guilds in Benin. The study also found that the Obas put in structures to organize the guilds. The study concludes that the civil war in the 17th century and the British invasion of Benin of 1897 had negative impact on the guild system in Benin.

I. INTRODUCTION

The name Benin' has its route with the arrival of Prince Oranmiyan based on the political problem which Benin Kingdom was facing at the time. As there was no panacea towards resolving the issue, complicated by the failure of the Republican government to keep strictly to the rules when the last Ogiso, Ogiso Owodo was banished for committing an abominable offence emissaries were sent to Oduduwa at Ife to send them a ruler. Oduduwa sent his son, Oranmiyan, to rule the people of Benin. Unfortunately, he soon discovered that it was very cumbersome for a non Bini to govern the people. Hence he left his son, Eweka to rule the people and gave the nnam "Ile-Ibinu" to the land meaning the land of vexation. Commenting on this, J.U Egharevba posits that, "After some years of residence in Benin, he called a meeting of the people and renounced his office, remarking that the kingdom was a land of vexation (Egharevba, 2005).

However during the reign of Oba Ewedo who came to the throne in 1255, the name was changed from Ile-Ibinu to Ubini to reflect the radical innovations which he made in his administration. D.N Oronsaye maintains that the Europeans corrupted the name from Ubini to Benin (Oronsaye, 1995). At the earliest stage of its development it was no more than a town but its later developed into a kingdom which was coterminous to the then Benin Division. Benin is one of the best known of the ancient kingdoms of the Guineas forest region. According to P.A Igbafe Benin represents a kingdom with a people that had a common language directly under the Oba's control (Igbafe, 1979: XI).

Coleman asserts that when the Portuguese visited Benin City at the end of the fifteenth century, they found a powerful kingdom (Coleman, 1986, 27-28). Bradbury on his part notes that Benin kingdom was one of the largest and longest lived of the West Africa forest states. (Bradbury, 1957). Again he maintains that the Benin Kingdom was the area in which the Oba's writ ran most strongly and consistently and that the great majority of its inhabitants spoke Edo, the language of the people (ibid).

In the 15th century the Kingdom developed into an Empire as a result of the expansionist policy of Oba Ewuare who was said to have conquered over 201 towns and villages. This tempo of expansion was sustained by great rulers such as Oba Ozolua, Oba Esigie, Oba Orogua and Oba Ehengbuda. P. A. Igbafe opines that Benin represents the unwieldy but fluid empire which was made up of a loose conglomeration of various peoples- the Edo speaking peoples, parts of North-eastern Yoruba as well as parts of Western Ibos, brought together by diverse methods to acknowledge the Oba's authority (Igbafe, 1979: xi)

This was made possible because throughout most of the sixteenth century, the successors of Oba Ewuare and Oba Ozolua maintained the tradition of military kingship and either led or at least accompanied their armies on the campaigns which carried the influence of Benin still further field (Ryder, 1980). Whatever the nature of the various controversies of its origin, archeological findings have been able to establish that a large population of persons may have existed as early as the end of the late eleventh century in the location known as Benin Kingdom but was certainly in place by the end of the fifteenth (Adefolaju and Jegede, 2017).

Initially, the kingdom was ruled by a set of rulers called the Ogiso until the twelfth century when Eweka dynasty took over. All the Obas that ruled the kingdom beginning from Eweka I till the present Oba of Benin, Oba Ewuare II belong to the Eweka dynasty.

II. ORIGIN OF GUILDS IN BENIN: THE ROLE OF MONARCHS

The origin of the guilds date back to the earliest foundation of the Benin Kingdom referred to as Ogiso-era (Eharenvba, 1966: 45). This period is identified as starting from about A.D 900 (Onwuojeogwu, 1980). The guilds can be seen as one of the longest surviving institutions in Benin kingdom. The institution has been described as a contributing factor to the survival of the kingdom (Ananwa, 2014).

The origin of the guilds in Benin is not subject to heated argument or debate. The scholars, historians and archeologists gave the credit to Ogiso Ere, who was the second Ogiso of the Ogiso dynasty. The first Ogiso was Ogiso Igodo from whose name the Kingdom derived its name "Igodomigodo" meaning the land of Igodo. Part of the reasons for the formation of the guilds was an effort to make the monarchy secured. It was one of the Ogiso Ere's concerns to organized the craft of iron smelting such that products could be sent first and foremost to him as the Ogiso. The desire to strengthen unity and ensure power and the need to organize the economic activities of the communities made Ogiso Ere embark on the centrally patronized units for the development of each of these economic activities (Omorie, 1982:15) The control of specific economic activities by the centre gave rise to the system called "Otu" meaning guilds (Agbontaen Eghafona, 2018).

Oba Ohen (C. 1334) was the Oba that introduced the guild of weavers (Owina'nido) in the fourteenth century. It is said that he organized male and female weavers into a guild and made their products the exclusive preserve of the ruling class. (An Interview with Barr. Aiyamekhue Charles on 16-4-2019). It was argued that the formation of the guild of weavers was to produce patterns to cover his legs because he had physical deformity.

Again it was argued that although many of the guilds had existed prior to Ewuare's reign, they were probably not as completely organized (Ibid). Oba Ewuare infused a new spirit into the organization of the guilds.

The common people in Benin were organized into occupational groups of craftsmen and professionals who supplied the Oba's specific needs in return for monopoly rights from the Oba in their various trades. The *raison d'être* of the guild system was that each guild was formed to supply some needs of the Oba (Igbafe, 1980). In fact a large proportion of their products went to the monarch and some were sold on his behalf. It is necessary to put on record that it may be wrong to say that individual craftsmen in the various trades were not in existence before the introduction of the guild system. Their activities attracted the Oba Ere, who was already aware of the benefits he stands to gain if they were organized into guilds, hence the guild system was introduced. According to P.A Igbafe, the idea of guilds was to pool together the different talents in similar crafts and industries (Ibid).

It is known for example that several localities in Benin like Adaha, Eyaennugie and Ugboha which have become streets in Benin City was reputed for the operations of their ironsmiths, called Igunemation' (Ibid) The Oba's establishment of a guild of Ironsmiths only implied that his interest and patronage gave encouragement to these craftsmen who were thus enabled to standardize their products, increase their productive activities and when called upon, deliver their finished products specially made for the Oba and in this process, they continued to serve themselves as well (Ibid).

Several of Benin craftsmen became rich and well known because apart from producing specially for the monarchy. They also sell their products to the wealthy chiefs and people. Ogiso Ere introduced the traditional carpenters (Igbasnmwunin) and it was Ogiso Ere who introduced the royal throne (Ekete), the Chiefs rectangular stool (agba) wood and ivory carves (Owinna). The leather fan (Ezuzu) the round box (Ekpokun), a simple undecorated form of crown.

III. TYPES AND SIGNIFICANCE

There were at least sixty-eight guilds or more at the height of the kingdom of Benin (Marshall, 1939). There were guilds of brasscasters, carpenters, butchers, ritual specialist, cattle keepers, doctors, drummers, town criers, ceremonial executioners, diviners, land purifiers, performers of funeral ceremonies for the Oba, guardians of Oba wives, repairers of the harem, river due collectors and acrobats.

It is recorded that twelve out of the sixty-eight guilds dealt with arts craft, hence known as the craft guilds which included: architects, blacksmiths, brasscasters, carvers, carpenters custom designers, beaders, tanners, sculptors, potters, weavers and cosmetologist (Obichere, 1981:77-79).

IV. THE GUILD OF IRON WORKERS (IGUN EMATON)

The blacksmith provided iron based materials needed in the palace. According to Dark, the blacksmiths were organized into wards, the oldest of which were the Adaha, Eyaennugie and Ugboha while others were the igunnekhua, Iwegie and Uselu (Dark, 1973: 63). They made large lamps and iron chairs, knives for the Oba. They were also responsible for the production of ceremonial 'ada and eben in Benin. They also produce Oba's doors, keys bolts and iron bells (Ibid.)

V. BLACKSMITH

The blacksmith guild (Iguematon) produced the monarchical symbols of authority which were made of Iron. They were produced for the use of the Oba only and were the symbols of his authority over his people in time of war, members of the guild were responsible for the production and repaired weapons and other iron implements used by the royal military (Osadolor, 2001).

The products of the blacksmith guilds were also means by which the Oba legitimized the rulers in the vassal states. The "emblems of authority" or staff of office" sent by Oba Osemwende to King Akintoye of Lagos in the course of the 1850s symbolized the Oba's hegemony over Lagos and the Legitimacy of Akintoye's reign over his people. The acceptance this emblem implied the King of Lagos recognition of overlordship of the Oba of Benin with the obligation of annual tribute to Benin (Ryder, 1969:14).

BRASS WORKERS(Igweromwon)

They supplied all the objects of brass required in the palace. It is well known that Benin is very famous and adequately established in the area of brass casting. "Brass was used for shrine decoration. Egharevba notes that in ancient days when the knowledge of books and literature was unknown in Africa, brasscasting or pictorial writing were the only methods for the preservation of the recovering of events in Benin (Egharevba, 1946:6). Omoregie observes that when a king joined his ancestors, his successor would have a headcast in brass for the altar of the late Oba (Omoregie, 1982). They are also very useful to the Obas in the aspect of recording event.

The guild of the bronze casters is affiliated to the Royal society of Iwebo in the palace of the Oba of Benin and they were in charge of the Oba's beads, his regalia, wardrobe, the maintenance and production of artistic work and decoration in the palace (Marshall, 1939). It was recorded that Oba Ewuare conquered 201 towns and villages. During this period, brass casters were mobilized to produce various military objects or items such as Ada and Eben (Schimeter and sword) as well as brass masks which were sent to vassal Lords by the Oba of Benin as emblems of his authority (Ben-Amos, 1980:5). Again Idia, the mother of Oba Esigie who came to the throne, 1504 is no doubt regarded as one of the famous women in Benin history and oral tradition. Infact she fought gallantry during the Benin-Idah war of 1514-1515. The Benin craftsmen depicted her in brass on account of the feats she performed during the Benin-Idah war (Dark, 1973:31)

IVORY AND WOOD CARVERS (IGBESANMWAN)

Wood and ivory carving guilds existed since the era of Ogiso Ere, but these craft groups develop through Ewuare's patronage (Ibid). Carved ivory was seen as a symbol of purity and strength. Ivory bracelets and pendants were worn by the Oba and important chiefs. Plaque-making in brass has been dated to Esigie and his son, Orhogbua (Agbontaen, 2018).

It has been suggested that plaque making was introduced by the Portuguese because the background motif resembled the oriental and western European motif, with which the Portuguese became familiar in the mid sixteenth century (Hull, 1981). However, Benin oral tradition claims that plaques of wood and sculptures in mud proceeded those of bronze and that the plaques were to have been arranged in series to depict a saga (Omoregie, 1982).

There were guilds of pot makers (Emakhu), weavers (owinnanido) Leather workers (Esohian) butchers (Iwaramwe) ritual specialist, cattle keepers (Iriamila) and doctors performing different functions for the Obas, chiefs and the people. Oba Ewuare is said to have introduced the wind instrument of fife (Eziken) and the guild of costume and bead workers who made the royal beads and scarlet cloth and his creation of the Iwebo palace society boosted the work of the costume and bead workers guilds (Egharevba, 1966).

New needs for which there were no specific existing guilds usually led to the formation of new guilds which was often effected by the emancipated slaves. While credit should be given to Ogiso Ere for the introduction of guild system, succeeding Obas created new ones and gave greater patronage to all the guilds till virtually all aspects of Benin commercial and industrial life were covered by these guilds

VI. ORGANIZATION OF THE GUILD SYSTEM IN BENIN AND THE OBAS

The organization of the guild system was based on family. A son belonged to his father's guild. The elders (edion) and the juniors constituted the membership of the guilds. According to Egharevba some guilds had titles attached to them specifically which were hereditary and quite distinct from titles attached to the three palace societies (Egharevba, 1968: 25-27).

The headship of a guild, for instance was acquired in one of three ways: it was possible to attain the position by hereditary, by appointment from the Oba and lastly by becoming the oldest man (Odionwere) of the guilds (Igbafe, 1980:27). The Guilds had a Governing council to run its affairs. The membership of the Governing council includes the 'Edion', the title holders and where there is no title holders, the Odionwere and Edion constituted the Governing council. The Oba sometimes appoints a headman who becomes automatic member of the Governing Council.

Although, many of the guilds had existed prior to Oba Ewuare's reign they were probably not as completely organized (Egharevba, 1968:25-27. It is said that in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century Oba Ohen begin the re-organization of these guilds.

The headman appointed by the Oba was in charge at both council and specific guilds he belonged (Ibid.). The council was responsible for the internal administration of the guilds within their specified quarters. For this reason, the guilds may be regarded as administrative units in pre-colonial Benin (Osagie, 2015). Within the administrative units, the headman, also the head of the council of the guild elders, took charge of the day-to-day administration of the guild. Both the council members and the headman had numerous duties with the headman having more to perform. The functions include settling all minor cases brought forth by guild members, except for cases involving witchcraft and homicide. Inter-two guild cases were settled by the concern councils. Guild headmen also collected the stipulated tributes, organized youths for public work and mobilized the adults for war at the command of the Oba. They were also in-charge of law and order within their own guilds or wards. Responsibility for the success and failure of the guild before the Oba rested with the headman....The guilds head also spearheaded the group in the worship at the guilds shrine during 'ceremonial and festivals and also represented the guilds at conferences whenever problems arose in the Kingdom (Tobi, 2019).

Hence it is said that at the head of the council was the headman, who was in charge of both council and specific guide he belonged (Egharevba, 1968:25-27). Also within each of the guilds, the members were organized on age-grades, the juniors and edion (elders) and were responsible to the Oba for the administration of the guilds they represented under the leadership of the headman.

It is also necessary to know that all members of a guild settled in the same quarter in Benin City. Such localities were later known by the name of the craft of the profession of their inhabitants and the names like the present day Igbensamwan and Igun Streets are examples (Igbafe, 1980). It is for the same reason that the quarter where the carver guilds lived was called Igbesanmwam while that of the weavers guild was known as Owina, Oregbeni was named after the elephant hunters guild while the guild of blacksmiths was called Igunematon... (Osadolor, 2001, 108). From the 15th century, European merchants and officials who visited Benin began to demand for variety of works craftsmen. Ryder observes that early European traders who visited Benin demanded for variety of crafts works such as Iron tools, wooden spoons, bowls, cloths (cotton cloths) ornamental beads, soap, among others (Ryder, 1969). So it can be said that from the fifteenth century, the guild had a wide spectrum of patronage and in this way they not only acquired fame but fortune. As a result of their service to the Oba the guild members received gifts of kolanuts, beads, landed property and wives from the Oba. Again some prominent members of the guild were given chieftaincy titles by the Oba which is the highest honour in Benin land.

As part of the structure of the guild system, whenever the Oba needed a particular product, the head of the concerned guild was contacted and such product was delivered freely for the well being of Oba Palace and royal household:

So the guilds were well organized by the Oba using the edion, title holders and headman to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. This is against the background that the support given to the monarch by the craft guilds was a major reason for the long survival of the institution of monarchy in Benin. The essence of the craft guilds in Benin was service to the Oba. The reason for the establishment of each guild was to supply some specific needs and requirement of the Oba and his royal household. The Oba shares from the pool of resources of the different guilds. The reason for the large number of guilds which existed in Benin was to ensure that the political, social, cultural and economic needs of the monarch was adequately realized.

Another aspect of the organization or structure of the guilds was that by their nature, most of them were interdependent. The ironsmiths provide swords, spears and poisoned arrow heads to the hunters while the carpenters in turn got their cutlasses chisels and other important implements from them also. The wood cutters supplied wood to the carvers while the elephant hunters provided the ivory carvers with the elephant tusks so

beautifully utilized in pre-colonial Benin. (Igbafe, 1980). In the same vein, leather workers obtained leather from the hunters and were used for the production of leather boxes (ekpokin) hand fans and drums.

Another feature of the guild systems in Benin was that the guilds were affiliated to one of the palace societies in line with the feature of their services. Part of the reason for this affiliation was that each of the palace societies took charge of the Oba's household and each of the guilds performed special functions for the Oba.

The palace societies in Benin consist of Iwebo, Iweguae and Ibiw. The craft guilds were affiliated to the Iwebo palace society during the reign of Oba Ewuare. Such craft guilds were wood-carvers, bronze casters, workers in ivory and leather. Iweguae society was created by Obas's Ozolua, who was the Oba who received Affonso Aveiro and his party in 1485 in his palace. The guilds of Oba's doctors were affiliated to the Iweguae since their main function was to care for the Oba in person which is similar to the functions performed by the members of Iweguae society. They took care of the Oba's welfare, health and private life. The Ibiwe society was the last of the three to be recognized as a palace society and that recognition was given during the reign of Oba Akenzua I in the eighteenth century. According to P.A Igbafe, the 'Erilerie and Ibierie guilds were affiliated to the Ibiwe society (Igbafe 1980. 27)

Based on the organization of the guilds in Benin and the functions to the Oba, Chiefs and the people, it is not a surprise that the kingdom survived for centuries. Hence Igbafe notes that by the fifteenth century the height of political prowess of Benin had been attained and no doubt that the guilds contributed to it (Igbafe, 1975: Xvi)

Internal conflict and the Guild system in Benin in the 17th and 18th Centuries

In the seventeenth century, there was much internal conflicts in Benin which affected the Guild system negatively. In fact, it was a challenge to the expansion and development of the guild system in Benin. The reign of Oba Akenzua I, 1641, Ahenkpaye, 1675 and Oba Eresoyen did not help matters in the development of the guilds. Oba Akenzua I ascended the throne at a tender age, so he was not really in charge hence the chiefs manipulated him. Hence he gambled away coral beads in games of dice with the chiefs. To complicate the issue the more he allowed the long-stored treasures in ivory, bronze and wood to be looted and taken away. All these he did to pacify the chiefs to support his throne, probably based on inexperience because he came to the throne at the age of sixteen.

According to Egharevba, Ahenkpaye imposed harsh laws which affected art production such as demanding application fees and commissions for bead (Egharevba, 1981:36) Hull remarks that by the last decade in the seventeenth century, the Benin Kingdom was in political turmoil and turned by civil wars which greatly affected the guilds (Hull, 1981:10). Again during the reign of Oba Eresoyen in the eighteenth century, the tribute which came to the kingdom declined because the kingdom was much smaller compared to the period of previous Obas like Oba Ewuare, Oba Ozolua and Oba Esigie. This economic situation within Benin affected the art and craft guilds and production level fell (ibid) More of the guild members concentrated their efforts on farming and hunting (Ibid. p. 9). Sad enough, Oba Ogbebor set fire to the palace and destroyed numerous treasures, because he was a usurper of the throne. Oba Ogbebor came to the throne in 1816. It was said that Oba Ogbebor was responsible for depletion of Benin art works than the punitive expedition of 1897. So it could be said that the inferno credited to Oba Ogbebor in 1816 was unmitigated disaster on the guilds in Benin.

VII. THE BRITISH INVASION OF BENIN IN 1897 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GUILD SYSTEM

The first Benin contact with the British was in 1553, when they sent out two ships to the Benin River under the command of Captain Thomas Wynham (Izuakor, 1987). The ships engaged for this assignment were primrose and Lion (Ibid). The Oba of Benin was interested in them and welcomed them very well and he agreed to sell pepper to them since he was aware that pepper was their special interest apart from other items. Unfortunately, fever was beginning to register serious disaster among the crew on the ships lying in the river mouths with many dying on daily basis. Out of 140 men who set out for Benin via Ughoton only 40 returned to Britain, Wynham and 99 others died of sickness probably malaria (Allen, 1969). Although the British made several attempts to trade with Benin despite registering casualties, it was the journey of James Welsh that brought tangible success.

In spite of the healthy trade relations between Benin and the British, with Ughoton as the main port, the relationship finally ended with the British invasion of Benin in February, 1897. Hence Philip Koslow argued that initially the advent of new trading partners promised benefits for Edo and other Africans, but before long the interplay between Europe and Africa assumed a sinister and destructive nature (Koslow, 1995:39). Acting Consul-General James Philips, who assumed duty on the 15th October, 1896 as the Head of Niger Coast Protectorate while Ralph Moore was on leave embarked on an ill-fated journey to Benin ostensibly on a peaceful mission to see the Oba (National Archives Ibadan, 1896). The events that followed the ill-fated mission led to the British invasion of Benin and the collapse of the Kingdom including the economic hub of the kingdom, Ughoton (Ediagbonya and Aremu, 2016).

The British punitive expedition on Benin affected Benin art works and the craft guilds negatively. First the invasion of 1897 destroyed the Oba's sole authority over the patronage of the art works and the craft guilds, as guild members fled for their lives as a result of the capture of the city and the flight of the Oba (Brinkworth, 1954). Secondly the guild system fell into disuse because of the changing demands, economic needs and the general process of westernization which transformed Benin economy from a corporate and institutionally oriented system to one based on the individualism of modern times (Egharevba, 1974).

Egharevba remarks that the moment the British invaders attacked and secured the city, looting began and it was an exercise that was carried out by all members of the expeditions (Egharevba, 1974). Some over 2500 religious artefacts, Benin visual history, mnemonics and artworks were sent to England and later in 1897, the looted artefacts were auctioned in parts (Ibid). Most of the bronze were purchased by the Germans and some were retained and kept at the London Museum e.g the original face mask of Queen Idia that was used as symbol for Nigeria festival of Arts and culture in 1977 (Ibid). Again, it was said that the Ivory taken from the palace was offered for sale and by the end of February, 1897, over 800 poundshad already been realized (NA.I, 1897). In juxtaposition of that much of the bronze and carved ivory and other antiquities were removed by the Niger Coast Protectorate officials and those not sold were sent to England to adorn the British Museum and enrich private collections (Dalton, 1899)

A major lesson that can be learnt from the British invasion of Benin and its implication on the guild operation is that guild system declined drastically. Since the Oba Ovonramwen was deported who has the sole responsibility to organize and protect the interest of the members of the guilds, the system could no longer grow as expected. Any reigning Oba in Benin motivates the members of the guilds in different ways which include gifts of kola nuts, beads, landed property and wives. Some even gave chieftaincy titles. The absence of the Oba in 1897 was the last straw that broke the camel's back in attempt to sustain the guilds. Again the atmosphere was not conducive during and after the invasion as most of the members of the guilds ran for safety.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The origin of the guilds date back to the earliest foundation of Benin Kingdom. The institution of the guilds has been described as a contributing factor to the survival of the kingdom. It is unanimous by scholars particularly historians that Ogoiso Ere introduced the guild system in Benin. Ogoiso Ere was the second Ogoiso of the Ogoiso dynasty. However, it was Oba Ohen (c' 1334) who introduced the guild of weavers. It could be said that many of the guilds had existed prior to Oba Ewuare's reign, they were probably not as completely organized compared to the time when Ewuare came to the throne in 1440 who infused a new spirit into the institution of the guilds.

The *raison d'être* of the guild system was that each guild was formed to supply some needs of the Oba. In fact a large proportion of their products went to the monarch and some were sold on his behalf. The idea of the guilds was to pool together the different talents in similar crafts and industries. Several of Benin craftsmen became rich and well known because apart from producing specially for the monarchy, they also sell their products to the wealthy chiefs and the people.

There were at least sixty-eight guilds or more at the height of the kingdom of Benin. The organization of the guilds system was based on family and the headship of a guild could be acquired by hereditary, by appointment from the Oba and by being the oldest man. It is also necessary to know that all members of a guild settled in the same quarter in Benin City and the guilds were affiliated to the three palace societies according to their functions.

The Oba shares from the pool of resources of the different guilds. The reason for the establishment of each guild was to supply some specific needs and requirements of the Oba and his royal household. Again by their nature most of the guilds were interdependent. The ironsmiths provide swords, spears and poisoned arrow heads to the hunters while the carpenters got their cutlasses, chisels from them also. The wood cutters supplied wood to the carvers etc.

Unfortunately, in the seventeenth century, the Benin Kingdom was in political turmoil and civil war which negatively affected the guilds. The British punitive expedition on Benin affected Benin artworks and the craft guilds negatively. Immediately the British invaders attacked and secured the city, looting began, some over 2,500 religious artefacts, Benin visual history, mnemonics and out works were sent to England and other parts of the world. Since Oba Ovonramwen was deported, who has the sole responsibility to organize and protect the interest of the members of the guilds, the system could no longer grow as expected. Again, the atmosphere in Benin was no longer conducive during and after the invasion as most of the members of the guilds ran for safety.

The significance of the guilds in Benin came out clearly when in 1957, the scheme for the study of Benin History and culture was set up at the University of Ibadan (Dike, 1957). The literature on Benin studies suggest that scholars are more interested in the art of Benin than any other aspect of its history and heritage.

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